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edited by
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and Steve Taylor

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Ecclesial Futures

Ecclesial Futures is an international, ecumenical peer-reviewed journal. It publishes high-quality, original research and theological reflection on the development and transformation of local Christian communities and the systems that support them as they join in the mission of God in the world.

We understand local Christian communities broadly to include traditional 'parish' churches and independent local churches, religious communities and congregations, new church plants, so-called 'fresh expressions' of church, 'emergent' churches and 'new monastic' communities.

We hold to an inter-disciplinary approach to theological research and reflection; the core disciplines being theology, missiology and ecclesiology. Other social science and theological disciplines may be helpful in supporting the holistic nature of any research e.g. anthropology and ethnography, sociology, statistical research, biblical studies, leadership studies and adult learning.

The journal fills an important reflective space between the academy and on-the-ground practice within the field of mission studies, ecclesiology and the so-called 'missional church.' The audience for the journal is truly global wherever the local church and the systems that support them exists.

We accept the following types of article: original research papers, narrative or literature reviews on a relevant subject, theological and missiological reflections, case study reports, conference papers and book reviews.

Articles of around 6,000 words are submitted to the co-editors in the first instance and further information on writing for us can be obtained from them.

The journal is published twice a year in June and December.

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Editorial

Nigel Rooms

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It is with great pleasure I can write this editorial knowing it will be published online and Open Access along with all the articles through the Radboud University Press and Open Journals in The Netherlands. We were extremely grateful to the good people at Wipf & Stock who originally published us and helped us get our 'foot in the door' as an international journal. However, after a tip off from Stefan Paas, who is on our Editorial Board, and via Frans Wijsen from Radboud University who has kindly joined our Board we can now offer the journal as "Diamond Open Access" with our new publishers. All articles, including the back-copy from the first two volumes, will be made available online – free to write for authors and free to download for readers. Do spread the news far and wide about this fantastic new opportunity.

This issue brings together some critical questions in our field addressed by a diverse set of authors from Britain and Europe. I hope this won't always be the case, and the International Association of Mission Studies Quadrennial Conference that is happening in Sydney in July will no doubt help, but it is interesting to have a full set of articles addressing questions of ecclesial futures in the western world, all gathered in one place. There are significant overlaps and interactions between the articles as they are presented here; use of the metaphor 'pioneer'; how disciples are formed and grow into leadership; the forces ranged

against such personal and communal maturation; the importance in all this of embodied spiritual practices (and therefore neurotheological insights into the how the right hemisphere of the brain can help us) which all adds up to a very different understanding of 'salvation' from that which we inherited from our immediate forbears.

The first article is a collaborative piece between four reflective practitioners in the UK and Germany, Ben Aldous, Luke Larner, Adrian Schleifenbaum and Rajiv Sidhu, who have crossed cultures and sometimes borders in their learning and practice of mission. It addresses the question of the aptness of the metaphorical term 'pioneer' for what happens when new worshipping communities or 'fresh expressions' of church are formed. This is contentious ground, but a journal like ours must not shy away from such questions – and indeed if anyone would like to offer an article defending the term in response I would gladly consider it. I have often wondered about this metaphor, not least since visiting the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Centre near Baker City in Oregon which showcases what is perhaps the origin of the term in modern era. Alongside the colonizing question within the pioneer metaphor which both the authors here and the Interpretive Center fully address – what I learnt there was the communal nature of the movement of tens of thousands of highly vulnerable women, men and children to a new life on the Oregon trail over decades; many of them never survived the journey. Whereas we, I think, rather imagine the pioneer much more as those who originally 'blazed the trail' in some individualistic and heroic fashion. All metaphors need to be 'taken and broken' for us to find their truth and their limits, and the four authors find 'pioneer' wanting on several counts. They also helpfully offer an alternative in the biblical notion of 'pilgrim'. Time will tell whether this might stick or other alternatives be taken up.

James Butler in the next paper, which rather asks to be laid alongside the first, assumes the metaphor and label of pioneer when researching what is happening in the field amongst 'lay pioneers' in the Church of England i.e. those grassroots people who do not receive ordination but find themselves nevertheless starting and leading fresh expressions of church. Equally critical of the 'organization' and how it has responded unhelpfully to the grassroots nature of the emergence of lay pioneers, I also wonder whether his critique of the unidirectional nature of what has been happening and the deficit nature of how lay pioneers are understood supports the critique of the label 'pioneer' in the previous article. Just as pioneers tend only to flow in one direction and assume they are to fill a space that is largely empty, so Butler discovers in several reports and documents an assumption that laity need 'resources, equipping and training' in a one-way flow from the centre to the edge. Returning to the

founding document of fresh expressions, the *Mission-shaped Church* report of 2004, Butler calls for a 'mutually enriching relationship' between these grassroots practitioners and their organization and outlines some principles for what this might look like.

The next three articles all started life as presentations at the 2021 online gathering of the International Research Consortium which was loosely hosted by the UK membership. We held a fascinating and wide-ranging 'Open Day' conversation on 'missional discipleship' with several more papers than those that have made it into the journal – though this is the reason they are all UK-based. I deliberately start with the contribution from Naar Mfundisi-Holloway, who works with the Salvation Army in Britain and is part of the Zambian diaspora. Naar has conducted a small qualitative study amongst women leaders in UK-based African diaspora churches. What strikes me, as editor, is both the overlaps and the sharp differences with the questions that James Butler was raising about formation of leaders in the previous article. Especially suggestive to me is the assumption from Mfundisi-Holloway that what these women require is discipleship and mentorship as well as, at some level, basic training (e.g. one of the research participants knows she needs to discover how to conduct a baby's dedication service). Perhaps if we framed all ministerial formation, of whatever kind and for whatever end, as discipleship this would have radical implications for the way we go about it. The participants show that their reliance on the Holy Spirit and an entrepreneurial outlook within their networks means they more often than not find the formation they know they require from those around them. Nevertheless, the routes these women took into leadership have many gaps too, not least in contextualizing their mission and ministry in the UK beyond their own communities. Mfundisi-Holloway therefore offers some helpful suggestions and signposts about how these gaps may be filled.

Nick Ladd in the next article also connects in interesting ways with James Butler's work – since the question of lay formation is also one he starts with. Nick shares with us some important aspects of his doctoral research in a single congregation which was on a journey towards a missional way of being church. Nick ably demonstrates what I have come to realize is a deadening and even 'crusting-over' of the fire of love for God and neighbour that occurs in western Christians within their churches over time. It is not that connectivity is not at all possible, just that the culture and behaviours that are learnt over time seem to shut down any initial enthusiasm and motivation for growth and maturation beyond a certain level. And the answer isn't, as it seems to be in some places, more of what I have come to call 'high-energy discipling', which ultimately also exhausts and even burns out its adherents. Ladd's research subjects, going on the missional

and spiritual journey, move outwards from an individualistic framing of Christian faith inherited from modernity. He shows how intersubjectivity is formed through appropriate spiritual practices which negotiate the space between the self and the other, especially in public mission; this is how ongoing maturation in community occurs. The traditional 'communal vehicles' such as homegroups simply are not sufficient to carry the complexity of the public nature of faith in a missional church. A new framing of these groups was required to carry forward the vision of the church now described as 'Sharing Life'.

It is not a big step forward then to imagine that once the churchy crust that has covered over the fire of God in a Christian has been broken open, joy may ensue! Mike Harrison places joy at the centre of his article since joy is also at the heart of the life of the Trinity of love. Drawing on such diverse sources as neuroscience, neurotheology, the long Christian tradition and contemporary writers such as Dallas Willard and Jim Wilder, Mike shows how joy ensues when we intentionally cultivate 'relational loving attachment' with God and which then flows out naturally into our other relationships. Moving away from the behaviours and assumptions of modernity about right belief through doctrinal assent two particular spiritual practices are outlined here, following Jim Wilder: 'Interactive gratitude and Immanuel journaling'. What is worth noting in this article is that the practices are both personal and communal as well as being simple rather than simplistic – as all good spiritual practices are. That the work of finding an ecclesial future for the western church is found in particular simple spiritual practices is surely to be celebrated and welcomed – especially in a journal that could easily become caught up in theory over practice.

In fact, the final article in this issue underlines much of what has already been said and picks up the importance of embodied spiritual practices in the contemporary Church. However, Dejan Aždajić from the Freie Theologische Hochschule, Gießen in Germany starts with the wider question of how salvation plays out in western world. He offers a very helpful overview of the state of the 'secular age' and where the disconnects are in how churches engage in contemporary society. He is clear that we must move away from just words in the head to engaging with whole person, and in particular the body. Such a move also brings us very much into the *here and now* of the present moment, which is of course where prayer and spiritual practices take us – and where God is available to us, thus underlining the point Mike Harrison was making. In addition, just as Nick Ladd showed, salvation, if it is anything is both a personal and a communal event and process and Dejan underlines this aspect too. Participation in intersubjectivity, as Ladd put it, is also key for Aždajić's understanding of how good news can be lived out.

Problems with "pioneering" mission: Reflections on the term "pioneer" from Germany, South Africa and the UK

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Abstract

This paper brings together four voices in an autoethnographic manner to ask questions about power, and missionary imperialism in the birthing of new contextual churches. These narratives come from three nations, each with a history and inheritance of cultural and missiological imperialism. The narratives explore our own wrestling with being men in ecclesial settings, inhabiting spaces of power, while seeking to do so critically. The paper opens up a conversation about the term "pioneer" as default language in many of the historic denominations in the UK, Germany and South Africa. It explores the use of the term and also asks how the language can be problematic. Finally, it offers the term "pilgrim" as an alternative word which we believe will be more sustainable.

Keywords: pioneer, imperialism, colonialism, mission, power, liberation

Introduction

This paper brings together reflections from South Africa, Germany and the United Kingdom on the use of the word "pioneer" in the birthing of new contextual churches. Ben draws on experience as a priest in the province of Southern Africa. Adrian reflects on his visit to the UK ten years ago and questions the helpfulness of the term in his own German context. Finally, Luke and Rajiv write together considering their work in the UK. We ask if the word "pioneer" has simply been adopted without any real critical appraisal.

The paper sets out the problems inherent in the term before briefly explaining the autoethnographic research method we employ. We move on to address the issues of the language in the South African and German contexts before

returning to the UK and finally offering an alternative term we think may be more effective.

Pioneering: a term inherent with problems

“Pioneering” and “pioneer ministry” is finding increasing currency in historic denominations in the UK, especially the Church of England and other mainstream church bodies. Increasingly those putting themselves forward to ordained ministry are being offered the opportunity to train as a pioneer via a special training pathway. Lay people too are inhabiting roles allowing them space and freedom to start new initiatives in places where the church has struggled or failed to connect with people. The Church of England defines pioneers as “people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit’s initiatives with those outside the church; gathering others around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community”.[1]

The Oxford Dictionary’s first definition of the term pioneer is, ‘a person who is among the first to explore or settle a new country or area’ (2020). That this is the primary definition of the word raises a major issue in view of the Church’s history of corroboration and even involvement in the colonising of the Majority World. For us, this is not a distant history, but one that we are in danger of repeating in the present day. Perhaps we already are. If a pioneer is someone who becomes the “first to settle” a new area, and who opens it up for “occupation and development by others”, what might this mean for the inhabitants of the spaces the Church seeks to reach through pioneering mission?

The ongoing discourse between pioneering, fresh expressions and church planting within the Church of England is a crucible within which these complications become red hot. Jonny Baker points out that, ‘the word pioneer is a metaphor and therefore laced with possibility and ambiguity’ (Baker & Ross 2014:2). Going further, he questions whether the term, ‘once used at the edge is now used at the centre has become uncomfortable or shifted its meaning over time.’ But there is unfortunately little to no wrestling with the negative notions of exploitation, subjugation, power, colonialism and residual imperialism in the word *pioneer* and therefore its negative effects. We suggest that this word needs to be rigorously scrutinised and made redundant.

1 https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/vocations-pioneer-ministry.

Both of the contexts in which I (Luke) have exercised 'pioneer ministry' have been ethnically diverse and economically disparate. As a working-class person, I see a great danger in the Church of England, often characterised as dominated by white middle-class people seeking to occupy community spaces which belong to ethnically, culturally, socio-economically and even religiously diverse communities. Anglican theologian Tim Gorringe suggests that to "so easily forget the church's collusion with imperialism, patriarchy and racism today borders on indecency" (2004:20). I have personally witnessed the way that well-meaning but potentially misguided 'pioneers' entered into a space, without paying due attention to their own situatedness, and have ignored and patronised local people who are already doing many good things for the community.

However, we all recognise that there is a danger here of getting bogged down in semantics. Much of the literature on pioneering takes context very seriously, and often emphasises discerning the work that God is already doing in a context before the pioneer arrives (Male 2016:20; Baker & Ross 2014:22). Some of us have written previously on contextual and pioneering mission (Aldous 2019, 2021, Larner 2016, Schleifenbaum 2021) and the vital necessity to understand that God is already at work before we arrive.

Pioneer ministry emerged in the Church of England as a response to the Mission Shaped Church Report published in 2004 (2004:6-7). Mission Shaped Church proposed new contextual forms of Church for a changing cultural landscape, often called Fresh Expressions of Church (2004). The document recognised two ways to do this, "progression" planting and "pioneer" planting. Progression planting builds on a significant existing presence of Christians in a network or area, whereas "pioneer" planting is aimed at planting in 'places and cultures in which at present there are few, if any, known Christians' (2004:110). This is interesting language given that the document is focussed on the English context. It is hard to imagine a place in England where there are few if any known Christians, one wonders if some 'particular' form of Christian is being sought? The report wisely recognises that pioneer teams should work with smaller resources and numbers of people because "large groups might appear to be like an invasion of do-gooders to the present inhabitants" (2004:111). Instead, a small number of "gifted, resilient and visionary people" is seen as essential (2004:111). The parallels to the colonial use of the word pioneer bear a close resemblance. Indeed, the theological underpinnings of Mission Shaped Church share this problem, drawing from the creation mandate, and seeking a Church which can "reproduce" and "fill all creation" (2004:93). The implications of this for people of other denominations and especially other faiths is alarming. Mission Shaped Pioneers, it would seem, really are the first to settle and

prepare a place for occupation and development by the Church. The expectation of finding communities with few or no known Christians feels dangerously close to the 'doctrine of discovery' – a "set of legal principles that governed the European colonising powers" which "emerged from a series of fifteenth century papal bulls" and allowed European Catholic nations to "expand their dominion over 'discovered' land" (Charles and Rah, 2019:15). The problem with the doctrine of discovery is, "you cannot discover lands already inhabited" (2019:13). For Luke, indeed for all of us as authors of this paper, this is a major problem with pioneer ministry – it too often sees new places as areas of potential discovery and colonisation, not as places where God is already at work among the indigenous people.

Linked to the doctrine of discovery, we also acknowledge Anthony Reddie's (2018:12) challenge to White theologians (like some of us writing this paper) to take a critical look at their Whiteness and to reflect upon the ways in which White supremacist thought and action has exerted a profound and corrosive influence upon the Christianity faith. The historical thought forms that have arisen from White normativity have not only advantaged White people, but also exerted unimagined pressures and negative traits upon Black people.

In many ways, therefore, this is an autoethnographic and confessional piece of writing reflecting back on our journeys in ministry and detecting the fissures and ruptures of our own privilege and superiority complexes in other intersections of identity.

Additionally, Reddie (2018:11) reminds us that,

> White Practical theologians may reflect on the fluid complexities of what it means to be a human being, but they rarely foreground their own embodied reality as a White person as they do so. For too long now, many White theologians have written as if their very Whiteness (or maleness) carried no ethical or epistemological weight in their attempts to undertake constructive God-talk.

There appears to be a new willingness in the UK context at least to begin some of this work, evidenced by the substantial number of people who attended the #DismantlingWhiteness webinar hosted by Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture.[2] But this point is important. One of the fundamental problems of

2 http://www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Dismantling-Whiteness-symposium.pdf.

Whiteness is that it has been rarely interrogated, turned over or questioned. For Reddie (2018) Whiteness has been epistemologically weighed, measured and found wanting.' The assumption is that as White people we will/should/can occupy the centre of gravity. Whiteness according to Willie James Jennings is more than simply a skin pigment issue but rather an ontological issue – a way of being in the world. Jennings (2020:9) says that the, "use of the term 'whiteness' does not refer to people of European descent but to a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning making." Moreover, he clearly articulates that the ideology of Whiteness leads to a formation predicated on, "the image of a white self-sufficient man, his self-sufficiency defined by possession, control and mastery" (Jennings 2020:9). Whiteness above all else desires control and tends to make love secondary. Whilst this may seem tangential to pioneering we wondered about the extent to which well-meaning pioneers have been complicit in this way of being.

Given the site of existential anxiety that most historical denominations operate from it is hardly surprising that the gift and potential of pioneering has at times been co-opted or appropriated by the centrifugal force of the institution. The institution has a tendency to manipulate and coerce the fragile things at the edges and propel them towards the centre by their institutional gravity. As 'pioneering' becomes more acceptable as a term, in the Church of England for example, it is embedded into the strategies and structures of the organisational language of the institution most readily seen in the recent vision for the C of E in the 2020s which claims to want to be a simpler, humbler and bolder church and where the mixed ecology is the norm.

Research method: A word on autoethnography

In this paper we have loosely employed an autoethnographic method. 'Autoethnography connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. In autoethnography, the life of the researcher becomes a conscious part of what is studied' (Ellis 2008:48). Autoethnography brings into play both the internal, personal reflections of the researcher and the cultural context that they inhabit. By recalling snippets or fragments of interactions and conversations in a setting these can act as key moments in self-conscious reflections on practice. Heather Walton (2019) has reminded us that autoethnography has become gradually more important for theology and theological reflection. Drawing from Walton (2019:6) we wish to write ourselves into a deeper critical

understanding of the ways in which our lives intersect with larger sociocultural pains and privileges. Taking these seriously, we each reflect on how we have inhabited privileges and witnessed pain, sometimes of our making, however inadvertently.

This is what Ellis and Bochner (2003:213) call 'epiphanies'. These are, 'remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life...times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyse lived experience.' Therefore the 'epiphanies' that follow act as a way of bringing into focus a particular issue or problem we have encountered in the use of the language of pioneering and fresh expressions during our ministries. Each of us have lived in different cultural contexts (whether Cape Town, East London, Frankfurt or Luton) each with its own set of complexities. By reflecting on particular moments from our own stories we believe we are, 'disclosing our location and assumptions upfront, in order to contribute with humility and responsibility' (Vellem 2017:1).

South Africa: Simply neo-colonialism and the import of British ideas?

In 2011, whilst still a new priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) in the diocese of Natal I (Ben) was offered an opportunity by the then Bishop to speak off the cuff on fresh expressions during a clergy gathering. I was ill prepared as I was asked 20 minutes before I was due to speak. On the hoof I tried to give a simple account of the shifts in culture and the church's sometimes inadequate response to those changes whilst explaining the missional impetus of fresh expressions of church and potential in a nation in a place of flux in a post-*Apartheid*, post-colonial, dying-embers-of-Christendom context. I asked if any of the clergy had a response. Right from the back of the Cathedral's Colenso Hall a senior Zulu priest in his mid 60s stood up and said, 'This sounds like neo-colonialism to me. It's just the import of British ideas.' I mumbled an insubstantial reply and sat down probably looking as bemused as I felt. And so began a journey of research around fresh expressions and whether it was an authentic missiological process or tool for a Southern African context. Is it simply a form of missiological imperialism? When the main protagonists of the movement in South Africa were initially White middle class heterosexual evangelical men what does the movement have to say, with any cultural and ecclesial sensitivity to the largely black, poor, high Anglo-Catholic Anglican church? From my experience in South Africa for 10 years, usually not very much.

But more than the external implications of this priest's terse comments began a reflection of my own role as a white, middle class, English (Cornish) man occupying a central space of power in the oldest and one of the largest Evangelical Anglican churches in South Africa. What right did I have to be there? Was my advocating for fresh expressions in a province largely shaped by high church Anglo-Catholic spirituality actually a form of evangelical imperialism when evangelicals were almost always white and of English descent? In South Africa the still lingering wounds of apartheid continue to fester in racial tensions and ongoing disparity. The #Rhodesmustfall movement, continued issues around service delivery and mistrust and scapegoating across the racial boundaries all reveal problems that mean language is always loaded and potentially problematic. Perhaps rather than being a healing balm my presence and advocacy for pioneer ministry was, in fact, more like prickly heat; annoying and certainly not to be welcomed.

As I reflect on the fresh expressions movement and pioneering mission in South Africa I think it has had minimal impact on the ASCA for several reasons which I outline below. Firstly, whilst it is rooted in contextual theology and is by and large committed to a process of listening, loving, serving, creating disciples and seeing church emerge it has had ecclesiological assumptions that in many ways were as brittle as the ecclesiology of the inherited church it often criticised. Too often examples of fresh expressions being lauded looked like what Martyn Percy calls "evangelical playthings" – made up of people who were bored of Sunday morning and would prefer to sip a Latte[3] in 'café church'. Whilst that may well be contextually appropriate for post Christendom white middle class 40-somethings it looks confusingly irreligious and un-Anglican to 90% of clergy and lay people in the South African context. My suspicion is that the first parts of the 'Loving-first' cycle, namely listening, loving and serving were not really embedded into the posture and practices of those advocating for the movement especially in truly navigating intercultural or majority black spaces. Often those beginning the journey of establishing a new church already had the end result in mind. In black working class communities, which make up 80% of the country's population, fresh expressions and pioneer ministry look alien, bizarre and simply out of step with indigenous culture and notions of spirituality.

3 As the Twitter handle "Star of Bethel" so beautifully points out https://twitter.com/StarofBethel1/status/1411282108182564866.

Secondly the language of "fresh expressions" my first Bishop told me, with a smirk on his face, sounds like a bakery product. But it's more than just mere flippancy or cynicism. The term 'pioneer' in the South African context cannot be uncoupled from its translated equivalent in the Afrikaans language of *voortrekker*.[4] The term is impossible to use without listeners immediately thinking of the great trek beginning in 1836 by the Dutch speaking people of the Cape Colony to the interior of the country. As O'Brian (2013:29) states, 'The journey of the Voortrekkers who escaped British rule into the interior would become an important focal point of Afrikaner nationalism, and the single most important event in Afrikaner history and mythology.' D F Malan used the image of the voortrekker to create a powerful myth for Afrikaner identity during the 1930's, a time when it was in great crisis. This image and its polyvalent sub themes connected to chosen people, the *volk*, and the need for separation to preserve cultural and racial purity were all the antecedents for the Nationalist Party's Apartheid policy fully instituted in 1948. The term pioneer is very closely aligned with Afrikaner ideology.

Thirdly, disentangling this history from the term 'pioneer' from its dangerous past, I would argue, is almost impossible. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that those belonging to historic mainline churches like the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, which is now largely Black and poor, would find the language of *pioneer* repellent. Whiteness, superiority, violence and imperialism are bound together in an almost impenetrable knot, each strand wrapped tightly into the other. In the late 1970's at the height of tensions caused by apartheid laws and in the shadow of the Soweto uprising, claims of innocence were to be bid farewell. Allan Boesak (1977:4) writes,

> it is a farewell to innocence for white people. In order to maintain the status quo, it is necessary for them to believe and keep on believing, that they are innocent. They are innocent because they "just happen to have the superior position in the world," or in some mysterious way they have been placed in a position of leadership over blacks by nature, by virtue of their "superior" culture.

4 Voortrekkers were the 'pioneers' or 'pathfinders' who took part in the great trek from 1836 seeking to settle beyond the control of British administration. Ironically, they were seeking a freedom from the tyranny of British colonialism but also contributed to the decline and collapse of the Zulu kingdom.

But Boesak (1977:6) notes that is also necessary for black people to dismantle innocence since, 'an affirmation of personhood is a powerful act that constitutes a farewell to innocence.' Building in a way on Boesak, Vuyani Vellem (2017) suggests that a Black Theology of Liberation does not simply affirm personhood and dignity of black people but in fact has to participate in un-thinking the West as an epistemological process, 'rejecting the architecture of Western knowledge as the final norm for life' (2017:1). But Vellem says this is not simply an academic exercise but a spiritual one. Vellum in his critique of the West starkly points out that, 'Western civilisation is no longer helpful to make any meaningful contribution to black life, especially when one interrogates growing fascism in the West, ostensibly in defence of the supremacy and superiority of one race against all others in the world' (Vellum 2017:3).

Is it any wondered that the senior Zulu clergyman stood up and so vehemently opposed what he saw as cultural imperialism embodied in a white baby-faced priest like me!

Germany: Pioneering like it's 1989

When "Mission shaped church" was published in the UK in 2004, it didn't go unnoticed within the German church. Pastors, theologians and other church-enthusiasts visited our neighbours in the UK in search of ideas and concepts they could apply to a German context (e.g. Baer-Henney 2015). As a student of theology, I (Adrian) made my trip to Nottingham in 2011 and volunteered at St. Saviour's Church.[5] Here I met a church that listened to a neighborhood and put the information to good use. In this case, St. Saviour's transformed a traditional church into a soft-play ground that cares for social and spiritual needs. As German visitors to the UK we found something worth considering. A church style that inspired many of us. Some left the island with a sense of doubt (Koll 2012: 219-236), some were convinced they had found a set of best practices and others were inspired to rethink church in Germany (Bils 2015). Overall, there was a lot of enthusiasm which made us eager to copy and paste what we saw.

Over the last ten years, this inspiration manifested in publications, meetings, networks, jobs and sometimes even fresh expressions of church. A small

5 http://www.churchinthemeadows.uk.

and diverse movement came into being, trying to pass on those ideas and concepts that were worth considering.

Many of our role models in the UK put "mission" at the center of its church-life. This is somewhat alien to church as it takes place within the EKD (Protestant Church of Germany). In my context mission feels like it's something to be suspicious of. It is for some a practice that belongs to the core of colonialism. Maybe it can be accepted in theory, when it's viewed as the *missio Dei* i.e. a dynamic God is responsible for. But mission as a practice, something that shapes the identity of our church? That was essentially unheard of.

Being slightly awe struck by the missional church movement I found in Nottingham, I grew frustrated with the slow tempo in which this mindset was being worked out in Germany. The structurally and financially dominant Protestant EKD has old traditions and a management that was slow to react. Therefore, it sometimes seemed unwelcoming towards innovation.

However, looking back a decade later, I am convinced that part of the reason for this slow-to-arrive concept is not only a slow reacting German church. The missional church movement is also something that cannot simply be copied and pasted. Because the concepts we came across as visitors have their faults and down sides. Some elements of the movement shouldn't be copied, really. And when these ideas didn't gain much traction within a mission-suspicious EKD, there may be good reasons.

Copy and paste pioneer missioning

It is my understanding that passing on inspiration is successful only by transforming the original concepts and ideas. These ideas need to fit into the narratives that shape their destination. A copy and paste approach does not work: at least not completely. Copy and paste hasn't worked for the Church Plant movement in the 1990s and it hasn't for the fresh expressions of church movement in the 2010s. Part of the reason is that the original narrative we tried to copy has its own logic. It works best in the environment it is derived from. The narrative of pioneering is a good example for that. Even within the Anglican context, pioneering has its flaws and limits (see the perspectives of Luke, Rajiv and Ben). In the German context, pioneering has a political and ideological ring to it.

In Germany, whenever one talks about pioneers (*Pioniere* in the German), one would not think of an incarnational style of mission. Most assuredly before 1989, one would think of young boys and girls in multi-colored uniforms, standing in front of a flag pole, saluting socialism. "Junge Pioniere" was the

name of the Socialist Party's youth organization in the German Democratic Republic. Most children were part of that organization. It was meant to shape generations by promoting Marxist–Leninist ideology among East Germany's young people. Through this youth organisation children were meant to dismiss political, religious and cultural ideas of the past, now deemed outdated, and instead of these old values, they were meant to embrace the graces of socialism.

This association of young boys and girls standing in front of a flag pole, shouting "Für Friede und Sozialismus – immer bereit!" ("For peace and socialism – always ready") is not simply a bizarre image. To me, it reveals a telling parallel, that shows the flaws and limits of a pioneer missioning approach, gone wrong. Pioneers can often be seen as those who want to change people's concepts and ideas from the wrong outdated ones to the new shiny mission shaped ones. Or put in terms of the "Junge Pioniere", to change the invalid outfit for their set of blue colored neck-ties and uniforms. It wants people to stand in front of a flag pole, saluting the right concepts and ideas.

As I said this is my idea of pioneer mission, gone wrong. Sometimes pioneering mission is not actually interested in the people and neighborhoods the church interacts with. It is interested in expanding the intellectual territory of their concepts and ideas, however just and holy one believes them to be. This however is not necessarily the idea of mission that people have in mind when using the term pioneering. One may use it with an intention that is quite different from the one I have just described. Still, this is the effect which the term "pioneering" has on me. Moreover, whenever I discussed the term 'pioneer' with other German people, I usually get a set of raised eyebrows and a dismissive shaking of the head. Further, in German theological discourse, "mission" itself is a highly controversial term, often dismissed for its violent history and the negative effects it has had on people. Adding a "pioneering" to "mission" it only adds fuel to the fire. It will simply be viewed as another attempt to gain intellectual territory rather than being fundamentally about serving and loving communities.

Looking into the missional literature in Germany, however I find that this is a perspective not commonly shared. People within the German Fresh Expressions of Church movement use the term "Pionier" quite normally (e.g. Henney, 2017, 141-158). I believe this is a result of a copy and paste approach. However, there are alternatives which Sandra Bils and Maria Hermann have demonstrated. Instead of speaking of a "mixed economy", an ecclesial term derived from an economic logic, they speak of "Mischwald" (mixed forest). With this metaphor they describe the variety within God's kingdom as a growing, flourishing and healthy forest. I find that much more fitting than speaking

of God's kingdom in terms of a profit driven competition. Maybe we can find a term, that fits a missional style, interested in the social and spiritual wellbeing of the people and neighborhoods we interact with as church. I find some of these ideas resonating in the term "peace-seeking-mission". Because as church, we are looking for peace on earth as much as we are looking for the peace of Jesus Christ. And in this endeavor, we are not alone. We can find allies within the community we live in.

United Kingdom

Luke and Rajiv say 'our skin makes us different.' Whether tattoos, or skin tone, who we are stands out from the crowd within the church communities we serve. My (Rajiv) first in-depth grappling with "pioneer ministry" came as I approached the application for ordination training. I had to demonstrate if, and why, I was pioneering. I could not articulate if I was pioneering. I am a second-generation Christian migrant, born and raised in the East End of London, with a working-class outlook on life. My multiple identities born of my ethnicity, cultural heritage, and geographical location, should mean that I fulfil the criteria for being "a pioneering presence" by the Church of England's own definition, at the outside of the traditional Church of England congregation. South Asia may be my heritage, but "Arrivals" at Heathrow airport is when I am home. But the conversation surrounding pioneer ministry made pioneering sound like cool coffee machines, a good haircut, and a really snazzy Instagram profile. The three case studies in the Church of England website only reinforce this image.[6] The implicit assumption of "pioneering" is of a white middle-class cis gendered world, in which people resource and equip each other before going out on mission into the wilderness of the world. This wilderness defined by cultures and communities outside the predominant culture of the pioneer can be a one-way process. Successful pioneering is demonstrated when these communities reflect the culture of the pioneer. Such cultural imperialism has no space for someone outside the dominant community. Iris Marion Young outlines cultural imperialism as one of the five faces of oppression (Young: 1988). This is the reason I found it difficult to self-identify as a pioneer.

6 https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/vocations-pioneer-ministry#na.

The first time I (Luke) ever heard of a 'pioneer minister' was when I showed up for a college open day for the Church Mission Society 'Pioneer Mission Leadership Training'course in Oxford. At the time I was about 9 years into a career as a bricklayer and general builder. A mate from the motorcycle club I belonged to suggested the course to me. The term 'pioneer' was new to me, but I liked what the speakers said about "the gift of not fitting in" and "dreamers who do" (Baker, 2014:1). This resonated with me as someone who has always felt outside the 'inside circle' of Church – which I have later come to realise is largely down to my social class. But through the years during which I cut my teeth as a lay pioneer minister in Luton, once voted the worst place to live in Britain, I've begun to question the term 'pioneer', especially in relation to the kind of relationship this suggests to the land and to the indigenous people.

Deacons within the Church of England are called "to serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom" (the Ordinal). Faith in action seeks to actively serve the community, and to meet the needs of God's people here and now. In that way, there is little difference between the call of a deacon, and the work of pioneers. And yet the concept remains problematic, not least due to underpinning assumptions surrounding privilege, class, and cultural imperialism. Mission Shaped Church embraces the call to "remember the poor" as "incumbent upon all churches exploring church planting or fresh expressions" (2004:7). It notes the influential legacy of Base Ecclesial Communities which emerged among poor communities in Latin America (2004:47). But this may not have been a good legacy to draw from. Argentinian liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid saw in the BECs the continued legacy of western domination and exploitation. Privileged male leaders training in European universities, and visiting European bishops saw something strange and exotic in these new forms of Church which emerged among the poor (2004:34). Had Marcella Althaus-Reid lived to see the days of pioneer ministry, I suspect she would have seen something of the coloniser in this language too. There is good reason to ask what sort of person the would-be pioneer minister is being formed into through their training. This is certainly something I have considered in my own journey. What kind of heritage do the terms "gifted, resilient and visionary" carry? As already noted above I can't help but think of Willie James Jennings image of the end product envisaged in much of Christian formation – the "white self-sufficient man, his self-mastery defined by possession, control, and mastery" the son of the plantation master ready to take mastery of his inheritance (2020:102).

A key problem with the term "pioneer" is that it is only used of one person in the Biblical cannon – Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). The danger of the Christian minister or missionary over-identifying with Jesus the Father's son, is that those

shaped and formed in the western academic tradition that Jennings critiques, bear more resemblance to the son of the master than the Son of Man. In this sense, I have recognised my over-identification with the male redeemer who in submitting to the father seems to lose it all, but in reality gains a heavenly reward (Tonstad, 2017:261).

Christianity's radicalism is this: it serves those who are in need. Cornell West affirms that, no matter how much we fail at this, the message of Christianity has always been "to serve the least of these" (West 2020). We are yet to hear of an invading or occupying group whose actions serve the marginalised in this way. Archbishop Tutu celebrates the concept of Ubuntu-of your humanity being wrapped up in mine, together we are human. This understanding is beyond binary limitations. And this understanding is at the heart of Christian theology. We are all called to partake in the Eucharist. Whether we term it communion (Jennings, 2010) or the Mass (Leech, 1988); Jesus' actions at the heart of the gospel, in the last supper, are a pilgrim presence: that sees and acknowledges and loves the other without question. It is a love that breaks bread and shares with Judas. It is a love that defies death, breaks through all social boundaries, and brings heaven and earth together. Such love does not need sales agents; just witnesses – pilgrim witnesses of God's love. That is how Christianity first spread, how it continues to spread, and how it continues to serve the poor, the lost, the oppressed, and the marginalised. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world without end. We wonder sometimes whether this fundamental 'being with' and breaking bread together can get lost in the pioneer mantra of taking the land.

A suggestion for the way forward – Pilgrim not pioneer

We have sought to show that a search for language and terminology that rejects a narrative around territory, exploitation, power and subjugation is very important if the underlying assumptions inherent in pioneering language are going to be addressed. We propose the metaphor of pilgrim over pioneer. Where pioneering has difficult engagements with mission, imperialism, and domination of culture, we suggest adopting Stroope's call towards "pilgrim witness" (Stroope, 2017:355). This is not simply as a resolution to the issues named above; but as a liberation of the *imago Dei* in us all. It is only by laying aside the binary understandings of the world that one can fully engage with each individual and community, wholly and holistically. Current conversation surrounding pioneer ministry, with inherent cultural imperialism and dominant

narratives are thus limited by their binary foundation. pilgrim witness potentially allows an engagement with communities as they are; building on the lessons of postcolonial missiology. Sanneh is correct, translating the message is key (Sanneh, 1989).

It's our understanding that Christians are not primarily invited to be pioneers but to be "aliens and exiles" (NRSV) or "strangers and pilgrims" (KJV). What would it look like to see the Christian missionary minister in the western context not as a pioneer, but as a stranger and pilgrim? A pilgrim has a very different relationship to the land and to the indigenous people than a pioneer. A pilgrim does not come to prepare for domination, but rather to discover what God is already doing. Dutch missiologist Stefan Pass believes that the use of the terms "aliens and exiles" in 1 Peter 2 means that Christians are "different" and "without power" (2019:169). He argues that a 'pilgrim' denotes a positive meaning of being a stranger, it is a rediscovery of true Christian identity, and it is a "clear warning against all missionary dreams of 'culture change' and 'church growth'" (2019:170).

We acknowledge that 'Pilgrim' is itself not without problems and was also used in the context of North American occupation of indigenous lands. In its Christian usage, however, it is a chance to see mission as a journey – where God is met in the stranger on the way and at work in already-holy lands to which one travels. It is language that reminds us of its potential misuse, but which offers us a different way – to travel lightly. We suggest this shift from "pioneer" to "pilgrim" may be a powerful contribution to this ongoing debate.

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Setting God's pioneers free? The need to release lay pioneers from the Church of England's narrative of resourcing and equipping

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Abstract

This paper argues that the reason that the Church of England has struggled to relate to lay pioneering is because its primary mode of engagement of resourcing and equipping is out of step with the realities of lay pioneering. It argues that despite numerous recommendations to release the laity in mission and ministry, when it happened through grassroots communities which became known as 'fresh expressions', the Church of England was unable to recognize it. By exploring both the "organizational story" and the "grassroots story", this paper demonstrates that the problem is the Church of England's reflex to view everything through a lens of resourcing and equipping. This lens means all problems are framed as deficit, in this case of the laity, which are

remedied through the resources of the church. The paper reveals that this lens causes it to miss the gifts and challenges of lay pioneering, and makes it unable to engage in the mutual relationships called for in the report "Setting God's People Free" (Archbishops Council, 2017). The paper calls for a deeper engagement by the Church of England with grassroots stories of lay pioneers and to allow the narrative of resourcing and equipping to be interrupted. It suggests that attentive listening to lay pioneers and their stories can lead to more mutual and reciprocal engagement and as a result enrich the Church of England and other denominations.

Keywords: Lay pioneering; Setting God's People Free; resourcing and equipping; laity; mutuality

Introduction

At the heart of this paper is a question about lay pioneering. For all the evidence that pioneer ministry is a lay movement and a rich site of mission and ministry, why is it that lay pioneering is the poor relation to ordained pioneering? And why has it been so difficult for the Church of England (CofE) to embrace lay pioneering as it has emerged? The CofE website defines pioneers as those who are

> able to see a new future, and have the skills and gifts needed to make it a reality now. Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community. Pioneers are leaders of innovation, with a gift for seeing what God is doing and responding creatively to it. ("Vocations to Pioneer Ministry", 2021)

In this paper I argue that the lens through which the CofE has viewed lay pioneering is problematic. I will name this lens as the 'equipping and resourcing lens' and describe how the CofE has a tendency to name the problem as deficit and to see the solution as resourcing and training. I will argue that the CofE needs to return to its earlier instincts in *Mission Shaped Church*, to embrace this as a lay movement which it has hoped to initiate for many years and adopt a more reciprocal pattern of learning and ministry. To do this I will take a hermeneutical approach comparing and reflecting on a number of CofE documents and reports on the laity and pioneering.

Two Stories of Fresh Expressions

A discussion of lay pioneering in the CofE must include the *Mission Shaped Church* report and fresh expressions. When I teach about fresh expressions I tell two stories. The first is one about the *Mission Shaped Church* report (Cray, 2004), about how it encouraged a growth in these fresh expressions of church, of dioceses encouraging and resourcing these fresh expressions, of the designation of Ordained Pioneers, and the Strategic Development Fund (SDF). The second story is my story, arriving at university in the year 2000 and meeting a whole group of people who were connecting with the 24-7 Prayer Movement (Greig, 2003) asking what faith meant to our fellow students with little interest in church, and dreaming about small communities who gathered to pray and engaged the wider community through mission and social action. It was a time of seeing similar Christian communities appearing in different places. We were excited when we discovered that the CofE had taken notice and wanted to provide a space for such communities where it could learn from them and be renewed by them. One story is told from the perspective of the ecclesial organization, the other from the grassroots. These stories are completely interrelated, but they are two distinctive views on the same story. Steve Taylor (2019) and Sabrina Müller (2019a; 2019b) have both engaged in qualitative research around fresh expressions and pioneering and have noticed similar trends. Taylor distinguishes between "first expressions" which are "defined as initial experiments in ecclesial innovation", whereas "Fresh Expressions" describes "an organisational initiative" (Taylor, 2019: 4–5). Müller describes the way in which movements like fresh expressions have a relational and dialogical ecclesiology which can seem in contradiction with organizational definitions of church. They certainly offer a critique of institutional church and yet by valuing context and tradition try to find a place within the church, the "mixed economy" (Müller, 2019a: 142). Müller and Taylor will be helpful conversation partners through this exploration of lay pioneering.

By keeping these two stories, the grassroots story and the organizational story, in mind I will explore the development of lay pioneering in the CofE and use it to identify some of the possible reasons why the relationship between lay pioneering and the CofE has not been straightforward. The words "grassroots" and "organizational" have been carefully chosen to avoid the unhelpful connotations associated with the language of institutional. Following the practical theologian and ecclesiologist Clare Watkins I see the use of centre and edges within the fresh expressions literature as referring to ecclesial structures and would

distinguish that from a more "edgeless" ecclesiology seen and experienced in practice (Watkins, 2020: 147–50).

In search of the laity

The *Kingdom Calling* report identifies "The idea that the renewal of the church for mission" as hinging on "enabling the fuller participation of the laity became widespread in the decades following the Second World War" (Faith and Order Commission, 2020: 4). The report *Towards the Conversion of England* (Commission on Evangelism, 1945) names this clearly, calling for the laity to be recognized as the priesthood in the world, and trained appropriately. Similar questions about the recognition of the laity were raised by the report *All Are Called* (Board of Education, 1985) and the *Formation for Ministry in a learning Church* Report (Archbishops Council, 2003) called for the training of the laity. 60 years of reports recommending that the laity be recognized and release seemingly made little difference. The *Mission Shaped Church* report offered a different perspective; rather than the need to mobilize the laity, it identified a largely lay movement.

Mission Shaped Church

Mission Shaped Church (Cray, 2004) was an initiative of Rowan Williams, who had just become Archbishop of Canterbury. Taylor, drawing out themes from his interview with Rowan Williams, describes how fresh expressions came out of Rowan Williams' attentiveness to what was going on. He saw how these emerging groups and communities were developing and wanted to see how they could help shape the church more widely. Flowing from a conviction that the church should pay attention to the edges and is renewed from the edges, fresh expressions was seen as a way that the life of the edges could be brought together with the "inherited" church. As Taylor states,

> There is no evidence of [fresh expressions] being rooted in concern about the decline of the church, a desire for managerialism and restructuring or a search for relevance. Rather, by deciding to be located 'in the middle of things', in the life of churches, and by a practice of discernment which 'watches' ecclesial life, an innovation has taken shape. (Taylor 2019: 101)

"Fresh expressions" was the church paying attention to the grassroots story and seeking to discern God's mission, not an organization responding to organizational pressures.

Mission Shaped Church recognized twelve different emerging expressions of church. As the report notes, many of these were lay led, and would continue to need to be lay led.

> If the missionary challenge we face is to be met, many new initiatives will be lay led. They are also as likely to have emerged unplanned through local discernment of the mission of God, as to have been meticulously planned in advance. This raises new challenges for the discernment, training, recognition and authorization of leaders. (Cray, 2004: 135)

> The Church of England should develop procedures that provisionally acknowledge the work and gifting of existing and future lay leaders in church plants and other expressions of church. A pattern should develop that provides training as part of a process of discernment for- authorization, rather than training subsequent to discernment, or the removal of existing leaders for training elsewhere. (Cray, 2004: 147)

The report identified the challenges this emerging pattern of lay leadership brought to the traditional patterns of training and asked how this emerging leadership could be recognised and trained without disrupting what was emerging. It clearly locates this in a theology of the missio Dei, of discerning and responding to God's mission in the world.

The Church Army's research into fresh expressions, *The Day of Small Things* (Lings, 2016), brought quantitative evidence of continuing lay leadership in fresh expressions and pioneering. It found that about half of fresh expressions were led by lay leaders, 67% of those lay leaders were women and about 40% were voluntary (Lings, 2016: 175). This demonstrated a very different pattern of leadership, one which some found threatening and some celebrated. In a church which had previously lamented the lack of lay participation and over sixty years had set targets to increase it, this surge in lay participation and leadership seemed a great opportunity. This grassroots lay movement was exactly the kind of thing that the CofE had been hoping to initiate.

Setting God's People Free

It is therefore somewhat surprising that the next big report focused on lay mobilisation, *Setting God's People Free* (2017), has no reference to *Mission Shaped Church* and only fleeting references to fresh expressions as some of the things lay people are involved in. It fails to recognise fresh expressions as a predominantly lay movement. *Setting God's People Free* has a focus on liberating the laity for fruitful ministry in both church-based ministry and 'in work and school, in gym and shop, in field and factory, Monday to Saturday' (Archbishops Council 2017, 1). Through the exploration of these themes, the report identifies critical shifts in culture and practice which are needed to enable this.

1. Until, together, ordained and lay, we form and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life in ways that demonstrate the Gospel we will never set God's people free to evangelise the nation.
2. Until laity and clergy are convinced, based on their baptismal mutuality, that they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission, we will never form Christian communities that can evangelise the nation. (Archbishops Council 2017: 2)

In these two critical shifts there is an emphasis on mutuality, on equal worth, and complementary gifting and calling between laity and clergy.

In this brief overview of some of the key documents around the laity from the CofE over the previous 80 years, it is possible to hear the two stories speaking but not necessarily recognizing each other. Many of these reports begin with the organizational story and a concern for the reversal of church decline. *Mission Shaped Church* is, at least in its origins, a recognition and articulation of what is happening in the grassroots. So how does this idea of two narratives help us to explore the understanding of laity in the CofE?

Setting God's people free from whom?

Setting God's People Free identifies two key cultural shifts: lay and ordained together equipping lay people, and mutuality and partnership of clergy and laity. While there are some recommendations toward mutuality, the dominant language of the report is about resourcing, equipping, enabling and empowering. This is the organizational story; mobilizing in response to the threat of decline. Equipping and resourcing becomes the key lens through which everything is read. This may seem reasonable, and indeed there is an important role for the

CofE in equipping, resourcing and training, but inherent in this language is the assumption that learning and resources flow from the organizational centre to the edges. Calls for mutuality and partnership become lost.[1] To help to illustrate this I will turn to a few examples. The report offers a whole series of 'stories that illustrate the shifts that are needed' (Archbishops Council, 2017: 5). The first story shared, and one which seems to be regularly repeated, quotes a teacher who says, "I teach Sunday school 45 minutes a week and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. I teach in a school 45 hours a week and the church has never prayed for me" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 5).

Because of the training and equipping lens, stories like this are interpreted as lay people lacking confidence to live out their faith in their daily jobs. The report responds that "the Church of England must urgently find ways to 'liberate' the laity to become confident disciples in the whole of life". But that is only one way to read this story, and perhaps not the most obvious. A better reading might well be that the teacher already knows the significance of their work, they are just highlighting that the church does not seem to. Rather than lacking self-confidence this teacher is highlighting that their teaching does not matter to the church. The turn to resourcing and equipping would therefore be misplaced and the challenge effectively ignored. The report itself notes that "lay leaders say they struggle with a perceived lack of understanding within the Church about their vocation and calling" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 15), but turns this into the need for the laity to understand their own calling. It laments how lay people lack confidence and "have never been given a vision for their role in wider society" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 12). "Lay people don't just need theological resources to grasp the range of ways they can be fruitful for Christ in the world, they need the theological imagination to see the ways they already have been" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 14). Rather than value what is happening and recognizing the challenge from the laity, the report continually identifies deficit in the laity and the need for the CofE to provide the resources to overcome that.

This emphasis on training and equipping draws the focus away from mutuality and towards an understanding of the laity as passive and unaware of their calling. This may be true for some, but it is also clear from the stories that the report itself tells that there are a whole range of lay people who have a

1. I am grateful to Tricia Frith, an MA student with us at CMS, for drawing my attention to the lack of attention paid to baptismal mutuality in the resources which have come from the report.

good sense of their vocation but feel undervalued and unseen by the church. This subtle shift from mutuality to resourcing can be seen in the report where it lists the support lay people would like to have; one of the items is "connections to others to learn from and share with". However, once this is explored in more detail a few pages later it becomes "Easy access to, and signposting of the best available tools, resources, approaches, case studies, stories and experts to inspire and support people in their whole life discipleship and vocational journey" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 21). What was requested was relational spaces of mutual learning, and yet this was translated into signposting of resources; the "experts" who have the wisdom to release these unconfident and oblivious lay people. Framing the problem this way means that the call to mutuality is lost. Laity continue to be seen as the ones who need training, and clergy as the ones who train. This leads to my biggest question about the report, what or whom do lay people need to be set free from? In this paper I am suggesting that there is a need to be set free from purely an organizational story and to bring the richness of the grassroots story fully into the dialogue.

The problem of training and the need for mutuality

The biggest problem with the kind of training being suggested is that it does not seem to work. *Setting God's People Free* identifies this itself. Talking about resources it states, "Available resources are thin. Take-up is also low, reflecting the fact most have never been given a vision for their role in wider society" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 12). It repeats a similar claim later, noting a "low awareness of the resources and networks that exist" and that take-up of these resources is low because "few have been given a vision for whole-life discipleship" (Archbishops Council, 2017: 12). The report identifies that the current resourcing approach is not working. But it blames this on lay people claiming that they have no vision for their Christian life, which is asserted with zero evidence.

David Heywood's *Kingdom Learning* (2017) was released the same year as the report and, as Heywood notes in the introduction, has a very similar diagnosis. He wants to see "missionary disciples" equipped and released. He emphasises how most learning takes place informally in the midst of life, builds on past experience, happens in relational ways, and often in social spaces (2017: 49–57). He advocates for reflective and relational learning, and yet when it comes to expressing how this is done he turns to programmes of learning with

learning outcomes, and sees the clergy or church leader as the one who shapes the learning and knows best what people need (Heywood, 2017: 129–44). This is the organizational story, where resourcing comes from the centre and sees a deficit which needs to be resourced.

Mission Shaped Church seemed to take a different approach, recognizing a movement of lay leadership within fresh expressions. However, once recognized, the CofE begins to shape it through this organizational lens. The Mission Shaped Ministry course was seen as the flagship training designed by the fresh expressions team, and yet *The Day of Small Things* report found that only 6.6% of leaders of fresh expressions had done the course (Lings, 2016: 165) and that training had not had a big impact on what had occurred.

Another piece of research carried out by the Church Army, this time focusing particularly on pioneering in the Portsmouth Diocese, looked at a different training programme. The diocese ran "How to Pioneer" workshops. What they found was that the training did not attract the people it was aimed at. Though they were originally aimed at lay people exploring pioneer vocations, many attenders were either clergy or lay representatives of congregations looking to do pioneer ministry themselves (Church Army's Research Unit, 2021: 30).

This programmatic approach to releasing lay pioneers did not connect with those lay pioneers it was aimed at. The report notes comments from clergy saying it had been helpful for their congregations moving them from a more passive to active engagement in the church. While this is helpful, the clergy's perspective perpetuates the organizational story. There is no clear lay voice included in the evaluation.

This issue of training not connecting with those who have a particular calling to pioneering or fresh expression has been recognized by the CofE team supporting pioneers. They have developed a new programme called Greenhouse which has a much more relational and community approach. It has based the training around teams coming together to reflect and learn from each other. It uses the "loving-first" journey of fresh expressions, which I discuss below as an example of the two stories coming together. It is described as a just-in-time model of learning which uses "the Godsend [phone] app, so that teams prayerfully discover what they need to know, when they need it, to move to the next stage of the journey" (Donaldson, 2021: 2). It is in the early stages but is clearly recognizing some of the problems of resourcing from the centre and trying to take a more responsive approach.

Lay pioneering

While lay pioneering has been a significant movement since before the *Mission Shaped Church* report in 2004, it is surprising how little research has been done into lay pioneering, and how little theological work has been done articulating lay pioneering. Much that has been written and explored continues to reinforce the organizational narrative. The *Guidelines for the development of lay ministry in fresh expressions of church* pick up the recommendations from *Mission Shaped Church* around authorization, training and support (Archbishops Council, 2007). Of the eight recommendations, seven relate to training and one relates to authorization. The focus is on the potential and the initiation of pioneering and fresh expressions, rather than on the fact that there is already a large number of lay people involved in pioneering and fresh expressions.

The biggest piece of research done by the CofE with a particular focus on lay ministry is in *The Mixed Ecologist* report. It is particularly interested in lay ministry as something which is released by Mixed Ecology Ministers. The research therefore focusses on the experience of ministers as they look to release lay people into lay pioneering. It retains an emphasis on empowerment of lay people by clergy and it notes that "These findings identified the importance of clergy as advocates and enablers, pointing lay leaders towards appropriate training and networks" (Perrin and Olsworth-Peter, 2021: 32). Once again, the interest is in the organizational story – how these lay people were resourced and equipped.[2]

In my own research into small missional communities many lay pioneers did not experience this encouragement and equipping; instead, they faced many barriers and challenges from their churches and leaders who dismissed the need and failed to recognise the lay pioneer's calling (Butler, 2017). Jonny Baker, a leading voice in supporting pioneering, set up the pioneer leadership training at the Church Mission Society; he describes this different perspective – pioneers have the "gift of not fitting in" and are "dreamers who do" (Baker, 2014: 1). He describes pioneering as a difficult gift, one that can feel more like a curse at times. He identifies how the church struggles to understand pioneers and prefers to recognize pioneering when it looks and feels most like church as

2. Since this paper was peer reviewed a report has been released by the Centre for Church Multiplication (Bruce & Brooks, 2022), interviewing twenty "lay planters" about their experience of church planting. It is good to see further examples of the close attention to lay people advocated in this paper and I will engage with it further in future work.

it is already experienced. He describes how "there is an invisible gravitational pull that is always seeking to pull pioneers back into business as usual" (Baker, 2014: 8). In this view the organizational story is problematic and undermines the gift brought by pioneers, trying to shape them into the organization's mould. Baker highlights the need for leadership as dissent, critiquing the structures and proposing alternatives. In the organizational story, business as usual is preferable to dealing with people who are going to critique and challenge, but Baker identifies the grassroots challenge as vital to helping the church fulfil its mission. He concludes:

> Newness that has depth is found by driving to the heart of the tradition and reclaiming it over and against itself, by refounding, and not by rubbishing it and leaving it. In the light of these anthropological insights perhaps it is not surprising that the Church has found that this gift is as difficult as it is essential (Baker, 2014: 11).

The relationship between pioneers and organizational structures of the church is unlikely to be an easy one, and yet it is vital. The problem with the way the church focuses on this organizational story and reads pioneering through the lens of resourcing and equipping is that it closes itself off from receiving the gift and wisdom of pioneers and their communities. There is almost nothing in the CofE's reflections on lay pioneers, nor on lay ministry more generally, of what might be received from lay people, what lay pioneers might bring as part of their gifting and how the space can continue to be made for that within the organizational story.

Space within the organization, according to Taylor's reading of fresh expressions, is exactly what Rowan Williams had in mind when he talked about the church being renewed from the edges. Taylor describes how Williams saw a need for mutuality in relationships. The edge needs the church and the church needs the edge. The organizational story allows the grassroots to participate in something bigger than their own programme, and the grassroots help the church to be attentive to what God is doing (Taylor, 2019: 103). Taylor describes fresh expressions as "organisational innovation' which is designed to draw the whole church into this vision" (Taylor, 2019: 117). This describes an organization where there is mutual and reciprocal learning between the organizational story and the grassroots story. The church learns from the grassroots practice, and is able to make space for, support and encourage such practice in a way in which both become mutually enriched. Paying attention to pioneering, as Williams highlights, could contribute to the CofE discerning God's mission and seeking

to participate. But as I have demonstrated, in the subsequent reflection on lay pioneering and on lay ministry in general this organizational story has dominated, the flow is one way, opportunities to be attentive to what God is doing are missed and this pioneer gift of dissent, as Baker puts it, has become lost and no longer valued. Even more problematically the lens of resourcing and equipping which accompanies the organizational story means that it becomes increasingly difficult to value lay pioneering. The gifts that are present get lost, and a narrative of lay deficit and organizational empowerment become the norm. The rich interplay between organization and grassroots is missing, and pioneers either need to be drawn into the organizational story or leave entirely to thrive.

Control and making space

In his excellent critical survey of church planting, Stefan Paas notes two types of control which denominations exert on church plants. Control through the horizontal planning of the organization and control through the vertical planning of clear ecclesiological or confessional outcomes (Paas, 2016: 201–2). He describes how both of these kinds of control stifle church planting. Horizontal planning turns to models and patterns, it wants universal principles and risks closing people off from what God is teaching them in the midst of practice. Vertical planning asserts that the new community must fit within the confessional tradition, limiting what can emerge. As Paas states, 'Horizonal planning makes the mistake of thinking that renewal can be imported from the outside, vertical planning errs seriously in thinking that renewal means to copy the past' (Paas, 2016: 212). We can see elements of these two types of planning appearing in the organizational story, planning based on the managerial and confessional wisdom at the organizational centre, and missing the learning from the grassroots and the opportunities to discern the missio Dei.

Paas turns to innovation as a way the two stories can be brought together and identifies three biotypes of renewal: free havens, which provide a countercultural space far from the centre living out radical solutions; laboratories, which create spaces for a diverse group of people to come together to solve shared problems; and incubators, where an organization makes a space for innovation within its own structures (Paas, 2016: 224–39). Paas identifies fresh expressions as an incubator, where the CofE has intentionally made space for innovation which can enable renewal within the organization as a whole. Again, the richness comes in the space to see what is emerging, to learn from it and respond to it. This is definitely not an abandonment of tradition but faithful

improvisation; confessions are seen as authority examples of faithful witness to Jesus Christ, providing a pattern rather than a "once and for all definition" (Paas, 2016: 212).

Müller in her reflections on church development highlights the importance of mission, relationality and dialogue. She notes that while these emerging church groups such as fresh expressions are a contra-motion and critique of organizational church, the organization also offers stability and continuity to the emerging community (Müller, 2019a: 142). But importantly this connection is through relational dialogue rather than more formal structures.

> Within the framework of fresh expressions of church, sustainable church development has to be grounded in tradition and challenged by context. The potential of this approach for church development theories is exactly this fruitful interplay of sound theological anchorage and the actual situation of people, networks, and neighbourhoods. (Müller, 2019b: 255)

This interplay between the tradition and context called for by Müller is closely related to the interplay between the organizational and grassroots stories. The church holds the organizational and confessional tradition, and the grassroots is attentive and responsive to life at the edges. Hopefully it has become clear that what I am arguing for in relation to lay pioneering is to move away from a purely organizational story to reengage with what is at the heart of the vision for *Mission Shaped Church*, a mutually enriching relationship, an interplay between the grassroots story and the organizational story, and a shift away from the singular lens of training and resourcing.

Reversing the flow

What we have been observing in these reports around pioneering is a tendency for the organizational story to view lay people through a lens of deficit and needing to be equipped and trained by the organization. Al Barrett, in his reflections on the churches relationship to outer urban estates, identifies an ecclesial turn in political theology which positions the "church's own 'performance' as the 'true' site of meaning-making, and a participatory politics which overcomes wider society's divisions of race and class, among others" (Barrett, 2018: 85). What he identifies in his case studies is an "outward flow" of resources from the church which reinforces power and privilege leaving them unchallenged. There

is a “flow which while it originates in God, is directed quite clearly through the church and out into the world” (Barrett, 2018: 87). This assumption that resources flow from the centre to the those lacking resources on the edges is a powerful one which prohibits the organization from seeing the gifts, wisdom and resources present at the grassroots, and perhaps more importantly, the challenge to its vision which comes from the grassroots. Barrett reveals how this flow privileges the white middle class. As Willie James Jennings argues, western theological education, and indeed western education as a whole, is about producing self-sufficient white men. Education is used as a means to maintain homogeneity and hegemony; the self-sufficient, white man making the world in his image (Jennings, 2020: 7).

What Barrett and Jennings both call for is relationality and mutuality. For Barrett it is a radical receptivity, engaging relationally and dialogically with those on the edges, being prepared to receive the unexpected and perhaps unwelcome gifts which bring interruptions and an awakening to the work of the God in their midst. For Jennings the model is Jesus and the crowd, a diverse group of people who would never otherwise be together, listening to Jesus. The crowd is not a means to an end, but “the beginning of a joining that was intended to do deep pedagogical work” (Jennings, 2020: 13). The logic of flow from the centre to the edges, the domination of the organization story over the grassroots story needs to be interrupted and re-formed. In light of these analyses, it is not surprising that the recommendations in *Setting God’s People Free* were reinterpreted through the lens of resourcing and equipping, rather than embracing an invitation to mutuality and reciprocity – a more “edgeless” ecclesiology which seeks to discern the missio Dei across the church.

Examples of mutuality and reciprocity

The question is, can these mutual models really develop? There are indications of mutual learning within fresh expressions. In all of the accounts of fresh expressions listening has been absolutely at the heart. When the fresh expressions team was first developed, Steven Croft the team leader spent a year travelling around the country listening to practitioners (Taylor, 2019: 112). Listening was a common theme across different emerging communities (Müller, 2019a: 140). And listening was picked up by fresh expressions as the first step in the “loving first journey”. This model came straight out of the observations of the fresh expressions team. It begins with listening, moves to loving and serving, then building community, exploring discipleship and then

church taking shape, before the process can begin again in the next community (Moynagh, 2012: 208). I know from my own engagement with lay pioneers and leaders of fresh expressions that this model resonates with their experience. Some only found this model after they were well on the way to developing a fresh expression and found that it matched what they did. For others it was a helpful starting point and fruitful guide through setting up a fresh expression. It is a great example of where attentiveness to lived practice has been brought into the service of the wider movement and the organization. Of course, all models come with risks and can be unhelpful when imposed from above, but for many, this model has been affirming and resourcing. The Greenhouse programme discussed above draws heavily on the listening first journey and is a good example of how training can be more mutual and reciprocal, focusing on teams who lead fresh expressions rather than individuals, and responding to their needs and context.

This paper is part of a qualitative research project into lay pioneering.[3] Early findings from focus groups with lay pioneers suggest that where reciprocal and mutual work is present it is often at a local level and enabled by strong relationships. This is particularly clear in some of the Methodist lay pioneers participating in the project. While they highlight that their experience is not necessarily true for all lay pioneers in the Methodist Church, they shared about the freedom and trust which is given them in their local district and circuit. The Methodist Pioneering Pathways (2021) offers a national network of support which it describes as a 'community of pioneers' and includes lay and ordained together. It offers some formal training but what was particularly welcomed by participants was the regularly online gatherings to share their experience and learn from each other. Where it was working well they noted how their local circuit and district had made space for them. They were trusted to get on with their pioneering and not required to contribute to Sunday church services. They had "good gatekeepers", line managers and clergy, who understood what they were doing, supported them, and were able to protect them from some of the institutional pressures. They identified other circuits and districts who were less supportive of their pioneers. Their suggestion was that the clergy in those areas be encouraged to attend pioneer gatherings, experience more of what is going on and build better relationships.

3. This research will be carried out in the first half of 2022 with funding from the Susanna Wesley Foundation, part of Southlands Methodist Trust. https://susannawesleyfoundation.org/.

The way forward for lay pioneering?

So, how can God's pioneers be set free? Not just free to pursue their own vocation, but to see that vocation in relation to the wider organizational story, and as a gift to it. What I believe is needed is a re-engagement with the grassroots stories of lay pioneering and to enter into these reciprocal and mutual relationships. Yes, there is training that can be helpfully offered by the organization, but it needs to move away from this reflex of resourcing and equipping, and turn to a posture of open learning and the attentiveness propose by Williams at the beginning of fresh expressions.

This is not just a struggle for the CofE. Müller's work (2019a) points to similar struggles in other traditional denominations across Europe. These churches need be attentive to what is already happening and to welcome the gifts, challenges and wisdom from the grassroots. They need to embrace a mutual and reciprocal pattern of work and relationship, not simply because this will be a better way of supporting lay pioneers, but because it enables the church as a whole to begin to discern God's mission together. For me, my next step in this is to engage in a small qualitative research project of listening to the experience of lay pioneers to begin to articulate the gift they bring and the theology embedded in their practice. For church denominations I hope they can find ways of being attentive for the purpose of developing reciprocal relationships, learning and discerning together, rather than simply identifying what needs to be resourced and equipped.

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Discipleship, mentorship and training which empowers African women for ministry in the diaspora

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Abstract

Various factors contribute to people migrating from the global south to the west. In addition to factors like war, economics and education, some migrate because they feel called to engage in ministry in the west. At the heart of mission in the diaspora are women who either start ministries on their own or with their spouses. This paper is informed by narratives provided by these

women collected through interviews to outline the challenges of engaging in ministry in the diaspora and the type of discipleship, mentorship and training they would require to enable their ministries to flourish. It also shows how in addition to reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide their ministries, these women adopt an entrepreneurial approach in accessing mentorship from local diaspora networks. This paper contributes to the broader discussion around discipleship and mentorship which prepares missionaries for mission in diaspora contexts, also referred to as Reverse Mission.

Keywords: Discipleship, Mentorship, Diaspora, Mission, Reverse Mission

Introduction

Various factors contribute to people migrating from the global south to the west. According to Wan and Sadiri (2010: 46), "urbanisation, international migration, and displacement by war and famine are some of the contributing factors that have increased the diaspora population around the world". The global migration pattern follows people moving from "south to north, and from east to west" (Marsella and Ring, 2003: 16). With migration comes mission. The UK church is diverse and churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America continue to send missionaries to the west to preach the word of God (Cueva, 2015). Roswith Gerloff's extensive work on black Pentecostalism in Britain provided great insight into how this branch of Christianity has contributed to the Christian faith, mission and socio-cultural issues in the UK (Gerlof, 2010). At the heart of mission in the diaspora are women who either start ministries on their own or with their spouses. In addition to running these ministries, they encounter challenges trying to navigate the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural nuances of life in the diaspora. The term diaspora in this paper will refer to "people living outside their place of origin" (Lausanne Movement, 2009), especially focusing on the global north.

In this paper, I use the term "discipleship" synonymously with Christian mentorship and training. "Discipleship" is a theological and biblical term and "mentorship" and "training" are sociological ones, drawn from leadership and educational literature. I also recognize that the term has a broader meaning and includes elements of catechesis, formation and pedagogy in the literature. In light of this, this paper contributes to the broader discussion around discipleship, mentorship and training which prepares people for mission in diaspora contexts, also referred to as Reverse Mission, and how this contributes to the

development of Christianity in the west. It also aims to paint a picture of what ministry looks like for African women in the diaspora.

"Reverse Mission" is a term that has been used to describe the trend where missionaries from the global south engage in missions in the west. Matthews A. Ojo defines Reverse Mission as "the sending of missionaries to Europe and North America by churches and Christians from the non-Western world, particularly Africa, Asia, Latin America, which were at the receiving end of Catholic and Protestant missions as mission fields from the sixteenth century to the late twentieth century" (2007: 380). Reverse Mission demonstrates how the centre of Christianity has shifted from the global north to the south (Wambua, 2009: 45). This is a "remapping of religious landscapes" (Adogame, 2013: viii) whereby it is now the global south sending missionaries to the north. It is important to note "the extent to which religious, social, cultural and economic realities of host contexts impact and shape their world views" and the way in which they operate their ministries in the diaspora (2013: x). Without a doubt, these churches from the global south have not only helped to reconfigure Christianity in the west, but they have also played a part in the diversification of the religious landscape of western societies.

Harvey Kwiyani (2013) on the other hand finds the term problematic. While he acknowledges that migration trends have reversed, "mission continues to move forward". He argues that the non-western Christian presence in the west will have some missionary impact on western culture, but "this is not reversal of mission. It is mission just being itself, no matter where it originates." Despite the different terminology used to describe this missional trend, a common theme running through these definitions is that migration is key in mission.

This paper is a reflection on the experiences of eight African female pastors who are engaged in ministry in the UK. It intends to outline the challenges of engaging in ministry in the diaspora and the type of discipleship, mentorship and training they require to enable their ministries to flourish. It also incorporates voices of those who started independent ministries (with no links to churches in Africa) whilst living in the UK and describes what type of discipleship and mentorship those who started their ministries whilst living in the UK received. This paper will answer questions surrounding: what type of discipleship they received in preparation for ministry in the UK, how adequate this was, how long they were discipled for and what challenges they faced and continue to experience while engaging in ministry in the UK. The responses will allow for generalizations to be made in order to begin understanding the role of discipleship, mentorship and training for mission in the diaspora.

Research methodology

The main methodological tradition used for this paper was qualitative research. It adopts an inductive approach, starting with the voices of those whose stories the author sought to listen to in order to draw conclusions. Creswell states that it is from inductive observations that a researcher can convey "emerging themes and patterns and formulate tentative hypotheses which can be explored to provide for general conclusions or theories" (Creswell, 1994: 58). According to van der Laan, this approach "takes ordinary people's views and oral forms of history more seriously" (2010: 203). The author's approach to finding participants was mainly snowball sampling, a process that 'yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who share the same characteristics that are of research interest,'(Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981: 141) or simply "contacting one participant via another"(Browne, 2007: 48). Creswell argues that the researcher's task revolves around "looking at the larger structure to explain the interviewee's meanings of social interactions, cultural issues, ideologies, historical contexts and interpretation of life experiences" (Creswell, 1994: 50). Therefore, categories were created from the findings which were then compared to themes within the qualitative literature written on Reverse Mission and Diaspora Mission to find correlations.

The primary source of data was collected through semi-structured phone interviews held with eight women from the Southern African region who are currently in ministry in the UK. Participants were recruited into the research by invitation from me via "informed consent".[1] The interviews were conducted in May 2021. None of the participants was a vulnerable person and they received no monetary compensation for participating in the research. The names of their ministries have been anonymized and pseudonyms have been used to disguise their names.[2] The original sample was narrowed down to eight as some cancelled the scheduled interviews due to other commitments they had. The countries of origin represented were Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The women were all born and raised in their home countries and came to the UK in their adult years. Six of the women are ordained ministers and two are not but are actively engaged in ministry and are referred to as Pastors. Six are in ministry

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1. A copy of the survey form with both the questions and the informed consent statement is available on request from the author.

2. Names of the institutions where these women received training in the UK have not been anonymized.

with their spouses and two are single women in ministry. One is a minister in a mainline church while the rest are ministers in Pentecostal churches. Two were in full-time ministry with their spouses before they moved to the UK and the rest served in various lay ministry roles in their home countries as well as in churches they attended while in the UK before starting their own ministries. These women have been in ministry in the UK for between 3 and 19 years. While there were a few claims of engaging with white British Christians, these ministries are monoethnic, serving especially black African and Caribbean immigrants. In response to this, Olofinjana argues that "despite the limitations that the term Reverse Mission conjures and the fact that we still have many African congregations, which are very mono-ethnic, Reverse Mission is still taking place in certain church contexts. This is in places such as historic churches that now have many African Christians and ministers" (2020: 65). Such is the case for one of the women interviewed, as she is a minister in the Church of England.

Research results

Ministry in the UK

The respondents stated that they started their ministries in the UK because they felt called by God to do so. While some initially came for economic reasons or to study, their calling was so strong that they could not ignore it. This is supported by their responses which stated:

> I felt the call of God on my life while here in the UK and started a prayer ministry with women and married a pastor. (BN, 2021)

> I left my country to serve in the diaspora under a prophetic word. When I arrived, I started going to a certain church. I tried to hide my calling, but God used me to perform miracles within that church; for example, I prayed for someone, and they were healed of arthritis which they had had since childhood. I prayed for someone's child who was dying in ICU they got healed. The pastors at that church released me, and I started my ministry and got ordained. I started the church in my basement, and as more people were experiencing miracles, we outgrew it and moved to a building that was packed to capacity. The Trans-Atlantic and

> Pacific Alliance of Churches (TAPAC) helped me legalize my ministry in the UK. (GM, 2021)
>
> I came for economic reasons and was planted in a church. God made me stay in that church, and he told me to wait for His instruction. A bishop from my home country passed through the UK and stayed with us. We had clarity during his and his wife's time with us, and started a branch here under his blessing. (JM, 2021)
>
> I came through a youth programme and was chosen among the many youths to stay and consider ordination. Then I went to Bible School. (CN, 2021)
>
> I married a pastor who already had his ministry and joined him. (TM, 2021)
>
> The calling started back home when I was widowed. When I came here I went to Bible School to learn more about the Bible but got ordained and I am now involved in widows' ministry within my church. (PH, 2021)
>
> I felt the calling of God on my life and started an independent church which I run for six years. (PE, 2021)
>
> I was running a cell group which turned into a church for six years. I then moved to another part of London and I now lead a prayer ministry. (PE, 2021)
>
> Me and my husband were sent over by our main church back home to train and support pastors in ministry here in the UK. (LM, 2021)

Discipleship, mentorship and training for ministry

In the limited way I am discussing it in this paper, discipleship is a process by which a follower of Jesus learns from the one they chose to follow. The person they chose to follow assumes the role of a mentor to an extent. According to

Hull, "mentoring is a personal one-to-one way of being and making disciples" (Hull, 2006: 209). The Bible is also clear on the role that Jesus played as a mentor to his disciples (Freeks and Lotter, 2014; Roldan, 2018: 162). The respondents experienced several challenges living and starting ministries in the UK. These legitimized the need for guides or mentors to disciple and train these missionaries in a foreign context. When asked about the type of discipleship they received in preparation for ministry in the UK, the two that started branches linked to founding churches in Africa stated they hadn't. Those that started independent ministries also stated they sought discipleship within their diasporic communities. Their responses were;

> When we got here from Africa we were one of the senior leaders in our denomination and everyone was under us so everyone was looking to us for discipleship. We had no spiritual parents, so we had to fully depend on God for direction. (LM, 2021)

> None, my husband who is also a pastor disciples me and I watch YouTube videos from other ministers. Other African female pastors also mentored me in the process and involved me in their ministries. Being part of women's networks who have experience helped me know where to reach out for grants especially during Covid-19. When I eventually went to Bible School here in the UK, I received training. TAPAC helped us come up to speed with rules and regulations for ministry in this country.[3] (BN, 2021)

> "None except through TAPAC who helped us and gave us certification, training and information on Gift Aid and the Charity Commission. We were also trained on people skills." (GM, 2021)

> I received training as part of Bible school here in the UK. I was given placements to gain exposure to various ministry contexts in the UK and what discipleship looks like in other churches. Through training I have had opportunities to preach, visit

3. "Founded in 1993 the charity is an umbrella organisation of independent Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches aiming to foster unity and co-operation in the Body of Christ, giving proper recognition, authenticity and power to member churches and ministries in North and south America, the Caribbean, Europe (including UK) Africa and the Pacific regions." https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/4004637

> hospitals, work in drug recovery homes and how to do mission in deprived areas. (CN, 2021)

> I met other women who taught me a lot about ministry in the UK. (TM, 2021)

> Because the church was growing so fast I didn't get a chance to be mentored or disciple. (PE, 2021)

The three who went to Bible School in the UK received classroom training and discipleship through placements. It is evident that although some of these women had some form of mentorship, it was inadequate as it did not equip them for ministry in the diaspora. Others have registered with organizations like TAPAC which have helped them come up to speed with regulations regarding ministry in the UK. At the same time, others have made use of YouTube to learn from others in ministry. Even though organizations like TAPAC play an important role in preparing people from other countries for ministry in the UK, these women have had to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to accessing discipleship and mentorship for themselves. They have mainly sought out mentors from networks with other women in ministry from Africa and Asia. Above all else, these women cite divine intervention which continues to enable them to navigate areas in ministry where they feel inadequate. The role of the Holy Spirit cannot be minimized in empowering people for ministry. However, just like Jesus' relationship with his disciples, being discipled and guided by someone who has more experience is vital in any ministerial context be it in a local context or the diaspora.

When respondents were asked to comment on the adequacy of some of the discipleship and ministerial training they received, they mostly said they could have done with more personalized training.

> It wasn't very adequate because there were gaps in the training. For example, I was never taught how to do baby dedications. (JM, 2021)

> It was not very adequate because where I was a co-pastor there was no training. I just had to fulfil the tasks I was assigned to do by the senior pastor. (PH, 2021)

Analysis and interpretation

The place of African women in places of power and church ministry has been contested for many years. Several feminists and womanists have reflected on this. The works of African feminists like Mercy A. Oduyoye, Isabel A. Phiri, Nyengenye R. M. Ajambo, Bolaji Bateye, to mention but a few, have critiqued how the location of African women has been problematized because African women are mostly silenced (e.g. Oluwatomisin, 2016: 160; Ajambo, 2012). In some African contexts, women are not complete unless attached to a man. For example, "a woman who manages her affairs successfully without a man is an affront to patriarchy and a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of men who want to possess her" (Oduyoye, 1995: 4-5). The fact that some women are now able to engage in full-time ministry as ordained ministers in their own right on the African continent is revolutionary as some churches still disallow it. Even more ground-breaking is how some of these women have successfully started their own ministries in the west thereby contributing to Reverse Mission. Oduyoye refers to Jesus who saw women as human beings in a society where they were dehumanized. This is why he took the time to "teach, heal and save them from victimization" (Oduyoye, 2008: 83). Therefore, just like men, they too "should enjoy the privilege of being members of the family of God" (Ajambo, 2012: xii) as they are participants in God's mission wherever they are (Phiri, 2004: 422) despite the hurdles and challenges they experience by virtue of being women in ministry.

When asked about their experiences in engaging in ministry in their home countries, they stated the difference between there and in the UK. They mentioned how easy it was to proselytize within the African context. On the flip side, in some cases, they found that some men within the African context failed to acknowledge the leadership of women in ministry (BN, 2021). GM's experience within the UK context was that "people are more sceptical about the gospel and very dependent on the State. Even when they are healed, they worry that they might not continue to receive benefits from the State which means losing their income" (GM, 2021). Two of the women suggested that the spirituality of Africans can be both cultural and religious which makes it difficult to disciple them effectively as they seem to know the religious vocabulary and can articulate their faith in ways that are convincing when in actual fact their faith is shallow (CN and JM, 2021). Furthermore, another stated, "because people mainly come to the diaspora for economic reasons, they struggle to commit to church and discipleship because their priority is working and are more likely to pick up extra shifts at work than come to church" (JM, 2021). These differences

are linked to some of the challenges which the respondents have faced while engaging in ministry in the diaspora.

One of the questions asked in the interviews was around some of the challenges that these women have faced while engaging in ministry in the UK. Many challenges presented were socio-economic, issues of prejudice, cultural and language barriers, and challenges in balancing running a ministry as well as working in order to not only support families in their home countries, but their ministries as well in the UK. Their experiences are far from those which European missionaries to Africa experienced. This challenges the assertions made by Paul Freston (2010: 155), who suggests that Reverse Mission can be deemed reverse colonialism. The term "colonialism" itself is entrenched in power and privilege, which none of the women interviewed have. Their influence resides within the parameters of their ministries and other diaspora ministries. These pastors who are mostly economic migrants from majority world countries have to navigate issues of immigration and other challenges that come with being an immigrant which grant them no privileges whatsoever in comparison to historical missionaries who had finances, power, and influence. The immigrant pastors I interviewed fall under what Samuel Escobar calls "missionaries from below" (2003: 18). In addition, the mission that happened in Africa, unfortunately, had close affinities with land dispossession of African people, due to the privilege that white missionaries had. This is what makes it different to Reverse Mission in the west (Kumalo, 2020: 2; Lephakga, 2015: 145).

The respondents stated that they navigated these challenges mainly through prayer and with the help of the Holy Spirit. It appeared that having connections with friends and other women in ministry helped them deal with the challenges of ministry in the diaspora. Those that had links with TAPAC mentioned how invaluable the knowledge they gained through that organization was. Some of the women who suffered burnout and issues of self-identity benefited from mentors who guided them through these challenges. For example, JN stated:

> I experienced burnout in 2017 and stopped our ministry. My husband and I joined another church because we needed to rest. We eventually started to participate in the ministry there in order to make up where we were deficient and see how things are done. We got the exposure we needed. We needed the experience of ministering in a diverse church with young people which is what we were lacking. (JN, 2021)

The respondents outlined several things that would have been helpful to know prior to starting ministry in the UK. These included training about the culture, information about the spiritual strongholds in the country, how to present yourself as a missionary and some guidance on how to run a ministry in the diaspora. All the women believed that mentorship is important prior to starting ministry in the UK as it prepares people for things they might not expect. They also believed that an aspect of discipleship or mentorship which would be helpful to African women starting ministry in the UK would be that which helps them understand their purpose and who they are (LM, BN, GM and JM). This is because it is easy to lose one's purpose and identity because of various experiences of UK culture and the challenges that come about as a result of being an immigrant in the UK.

They also emphasized the importance of discipleship provided by mentors who have been in ministry in the UK for many years and from diverse church leaders who would provide opportunities to learn from observation and practice. Other examples of the type of discipleship they would require included the following:

> Discipleship which helps people understand what their purpose and call is. This discipleship should be done by leaders and prayer partners. Also discipleship which helps black women with their identity in the UK. (LM, 2021)

> Discipleship from women's support networks and courses for self-improvement. (BN, 2021)

> Discipleship from people who are ministering to the people you want to attract. (JM, 2021)

> Discipleship from both male and female mentors. You need someone who speaks into aspects of the culture and has networks that are diverse. Also mentoring which helps you with your identity. (CN, 2021)

> Being discipled by people who provide spiritual covering and help you know who you are and your purpose. (PE, 2021)

From their experiences, these women have been able to articulate what type and level of discipleship and training they believe would be helpful for African

women who have the calling to engage in ministry in the UK. Despite the respondents being African women, their challenges and needs have a universal feel as other women in different ministerial contexts, whether in the diaspora or not can relate to this. The respondents also referred to the need to receive discipleship which helps them with their identity. This has implications for their African identity within Western contexts.

> I struggled with issues of identity as a young person being trained in a predominantly white college. I was struggling with self-acceptance. I kept asking myself why I'm I here? What is my voice since I am taught by white people? When I write my assignments, who am I. I felt like I was losing myself. (CN, 2021)

After much personal reflection on her identity, CN said she is on a journey of self-acceptance and endeavours to have her authentic African voice to be heard despite being a minister in a predominantly white denomination. She was able to make links with another African minister who has served in the same mainline denomination in which she is serving. He has been her mentor and has helped her work through her identity issues based on her experience and she is on a journey to use her African voice in her ministry. On articulating one's identity, Joe Aldred professed to being a "male Caribbean British Christian, a bishop in a Black-led Pentecostal church who currently works in the field of intercultural ecumenism and as a local pastor" (2005: 28). Israel Olofinjana responds to this: "Aldred understands that we cannot divorce theology and the practice of ministry from our cultural background and experiences" (Olofinjana, 2020: 53). While Olofinjana's assertion holds some truth, it appears some of the respondents would like to create ministries that do not represent the countries they are from. This is to attract people from other cultures and backgrounds. While trying to maintain their identity, it is interesting that some of the challenges these female pastors have faced in their ministries are based on the expectations of congregants from their home country. Some of the congregants joined their churches because they wanted to have a sense of belonging. Therefore, they expected church services to operate in indigenous languages.

> Some congregants wanted us to do ministry like back home. They wanted us to speak the local languages and sing songs from back home. Some left the church because they were frustrated as they wanted a Zambian church. (GM, 2021)

> A challenge we faced when we started out own ministry was people wanting our church to be a typical Zambian church speaking local languages. There was an expectation for us to be there for people all hours of the day but we were working too and people took offence. Now I am afraid to ask people from my country to come to our church. (JM, 2021)

What is evident is a sense of nostalgia when people join these churches and the need to feel a sense of belonging from a church that is led by an African from their country of origin.

It was apparent from the interviews that there are attempts for the pastors to reach indigenous white British people with the gospel, however their ministries are generally monocultural except for the pastor in ministry within a white British church.

These women have experienced some level of success in their ministries and use social media platforms to showcase their ministries, advertise their ministries, and to interact with a wide range of Christians within and outside the UK. For example, Pastor BN through her ministry has been invited to other countries in Asia and Africa to preach the gospel. This is an interesting dynamic because while their ministry in the UK falls under the term Reverse Mission, these pastors have created other networks that enable them to travel to other parts of the global south in order to preach the gospel and are considered as coming from the UK.

One thing that was not evident in the interviews was focus on integral mission or mission which "focuses on contextualization and integrating evangelism with social concern" (Wan and Sadiri, 2010: 48). Except for one pastor who spoke about getting a grant in order to supply foodstuffs to people in their neighbourhood during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the rest did not refer to that at all. This could be due to limited financial resources, as one stated "doing ministry in this country is a struggle because people don't give finances easily as compared to back home" (LM). There are some wealthier West African-led newer Pentecostal Churches in the UK like Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) in Kent, New Wine Church in Woolwich and Jesus House in Brentwood with substantial human and financial capital who engage in social action and evangelistic initiatives that benefit the wider society (Bremner, 2013: 2). However, the ministries run by the women interviewed have not gone beyond providing spiritual nourishment and a place to call home for their congregants. They are also yet to begin to address and speak into structures that are responsible for change.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided some insights into the discipleship, mentorship and training needed for African women in ministry in the diaspora. I have also outlined what type of discipleship or mentorship would empower African women for ministry in the UK by investigating the type of discipleship attained as they prepared to start ministry in the UK. The findings suggest that out of the eight women, only one received some form of intentional discipleship and training. Two sought it out from Bible Colleges they attended in the UK and the rest sought mentors from the women's networks they belong to in the UK. It is evident that it takes a calling and courage to navigate ministry within the diaspora. Many of the women came for economic reasons and it was therefore a big challenge having to juggle working, going to Bible College and then running a ministry. In addition, "many pastors and missionaries from Africa, Asia and Latin America lack intercultural training and are therefore not well prepared to deal with the complexities of the context of mission in postmodern Britain" (Olofinjana, 2020: 56). Despite these challenges, these women have remained resilient in pursuing their ministerial calling. These ministries whether large or small have also demonstrated how important local networks are with other diaspora churches. Their quest driven by a vision of winning converts offers a unique opportunity to analyse its impact on local levels (Adogame, 2013: xi).

It is also clear that those that start independent ministries while already in the diaspora need to find experienced guides to mentor them adequately as they embark on ministry in the diaspora context. These ministries are relevant especially "within the locus of changing, more complex migration trends and policies, these collective religious representations will continue to assume immense meaning and relevance particularly for African immigrants as well as the avenues for adapting into the host social, cultural and religious milieu" (Adogame, 2013: x-xi). There is no doubt that many ministries started and led by missionaries from the majority world are thriving and contributing massively to Christianity in the UK. In addition to organizations like TAPAC, I believe these women and others who fall within this category would benefit from organizations like Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World (CMMW)[4], an organization that trains pastors and missionaries from the Majority World in Britain, in order that they are able to contextualize their mission.

4. https://cmmw.org.uk/.

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Communal maturation and missional discipleship: A congregational study[1]

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ABSTRACT

INDIVIDUALIZATION EXERCISES PERVASIVE POWER in the modern western church, generating an isolated and privatized approach to discipleship and mission that has been attended to extensively over the years in attempts to foster

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"whole-life" discipleship. My doctoral field work in 2015–17 was with a single Church of England congregation that had adopted an outward-looking missional process which disrupted this individualization and challenged people to a personal and communal journey of change in which the public life that they began to share with people in their wider community shaped both their personal and communal maturation. This journey was fuelled by shared communal practices which in turn generated new forms of communal life to express the congregation's developing public Christian identity. This research demonstrates both the challenges and the potential of forming communal identity in an individualized culture. Moreover, when mission is undertaken with openness to the other, a profound interdependence between communal maturation and missional discipleship is revealed.

Keywords: Individualization, personal and communal maturation, spiritual practices, missional discipleship

Setting the scene, personally

From 2001 to 2009, I was minister of a relatively young (mostly 20s and 30s) congregation in an English university city. Outwardly successful, it was a typical programme church: large Sunday services, with a strong emphasis on creativity and excellence, mission and ministry led well by paid workers with volunteer teams, and small groups where people banded together to create a sense of relationship and belonging that was hard to find at a large Sunday service. The majority of people lived their faith in a separate world to the rest of their life: the most perceptive of them wanted this to be different, but did not know how to achieve this.

In response to this situation, the vision we developed was for mid-sized communities that would challenge people to take responsibility and ownership for ministry and mission, involving more people in using their gifts rather than passively consuming church life. The groups would be big enough to develop a ministry and welcome to a wider community, but small enough for people to feel a sense of belonging.

During this period, a woman in her forties – whom I would have counted as a mature Christian, someone to whom others looked for spiritual support and mentoring – came to me to say that in order to continue her own journey of growth with God she felt she needed to leave the church as she could not find what she needed with us.

I remember my feelings of disappointment and shock, and I questioned why she could not continue to grow by investing herself in the mid-sized community of which she was a part. But, at the same time, I had to admit that this large evangelical congregation was not the easiest place in which to explore complexity and change in one's life with God – however much I wanted it to be.

I had hoped that the journey that we were taking would be one of personal and communal growth and I deeply believed that it could be – but at the same time there were things that I sensed, but could not quite see, that made this trickier than I had imagined.

My discomfort with this situation was often submerged by busyness whilst never quite leaving me alone. What would it take to form Christian community that was outward looking and yet could be such that people might be able to make complex journeys of personal transformation within them? I had always been committed to forming such Christian community, whilst recognizing that community life can be both friend and foe to such development. I wanted to understand better how to foster communal maturation and this is what led me to my doctoral research project at Birmingham University.

The research context and the research question

I considered that my questions could not be addressed through theory alone but needed to be grounded in personal and communal lived experience. I wanted to explore this with ordinary lay Christians, attending to what they said and how they lived. I believed this would best be achieved through an ethnographic study, which I began in September 2015 with an Anglican church in a suburban setting in Nottingham.

The church had a congregation of 70–90 adults and 10–20 children across two Sunday services. The ministry had been evangelical for the previous 35 years. A good number of the congregation had been formed in this tradition, but the spirituality of the church as a whole was more varied than the label might imply. At the beginning of a guided missional process that they entered in 2012, the congregation was invited to choose pictures and metaphors that they felt best described them; they saw themselves first as a spiritual "filling station" for individuals and then with a mission to the community beyond the church. The vicar expressed to me his weariness with the programmatic approach of the church – something that resonated with my own experience.

I participated in a wide range of church and community events, activities and meetings – formal and informal – attending to the way they spoke and

lived and to the stories they told. I was guided in this by Hopewell's symbolic interactionist approach – allowing the stories they told and the symbols that shaped the stories to illuminate their world view and ethos (1987: 28–39).

As well as participating in their life for two years, in the first year I conducted a series of focus groups with most of the adult congregation around themes of growth and development and followed that in year two with a number of one-to-one interviews where the questions were more focused in the light of the unfolding story. I also ran a community survey and one-to-one interviews to discover whether the wider community shared the congregation's sense of a changing relationship between the two.

In the course of the study, I ran focus groups with leaders to explore emerging themes with them and then again at the end with as many of the congregation as wanted to attend. I returned in 2018 to run a focus group exploring further development in the congregation's journey.

I coded the data from focus groups and interviews and correlated this with thematic analysis of my field notes. Alongside this detailed analytical work, I also employed narrative analysis to allow me to attend to the emotions, relationships and power dynamics of the interactions.

Though two years was a substantial period of time for me, it was short in relation to the story of a church. So I felt that stories and commitments in relation to growth and development might arise more quickly if I researched a church that had opted for a journey of communal change. This influenced my choice of church as I opted for one that had entered such a process with Partnership for Missional Church (PMC). PMC is a process of communal spiritual accompaniment designed to enable Christian congregations to form partnerships with their wider communities within the mission of God (Keifert, 2006; Rooms and Keifert, 2014). It does this through employing spiritual practices that encourage listening, partnership and hospitality with God and the wider community (Ladd, 2021: 101–102 gives more detail). Though this was a missional process, it was the aspects of community formation and practice that drew me to PMC in the first place. It was one of the serendipities of the project that it revealed the interdependence of communal maturation and an approach to missional engagement which takes seriously the agency of the other – hence this article.

When I spoke to people in the church, I used words like growth, change or development. I felt that asking people about their "maturity" would be akin to asking them about their humility – it would make them introspective and cautious – whereas I wanted them to be free to tell their stories. It was then up to me in my theological reflection to make the connections with processes of maturation.

> The aims of the research project were encapsulated in this question:
>
> What are people's understanding and experience of change and development when their church journeys with the *Partnership for Missional Church* (PMC) process?
> What light might this shed on issues of maturity through community?

To summarize: the stories of the congregation's personal and communal journeys was the focus, the PMC process was the catalyst for many conversations and maturation was my reflective and reflexive question.

I took a narrative approach to analysis and interpretation. This allowed me to draw the findings from the stories of my participants – both in substance and feeling. What emerged were two stories or, rather story and counter-story. The story was about a journey outwards towards the wider community and the formation of public Christian identity based on partnership and hospitality with the other – divine and human, both proximate and distant, which shaped the way they shared their faith and formed community and was grounded in a democratizing approach to learning and a turning of church inside out. The counter-story was reactive to this, holding on to an "expert-driven" approach to knowledge as the key to growth and a commitment to bringing outsiders in to the church – in principle if not in practice. I will tell these stories and the conflicts between them in future writing. My focus here is on the way in which this journey outwards shaped their maturation both personally and as a community.

Overview of the argument

One of the most arresting findings of the research was the pervasive power of individualization – even when attempts at a more communal practice were being made. Individualization fosters an isolating and privatised approach to discipleship and mission – one which is closed to the other who is different, creating a chasm between privatized fellowship and public witness. Taylor's concept of the "buffered self" is important for understanding this as a cultural norm (2007: 37–42).

The missional impulse of the journey outwards towards the other was the way to enable change in their culture as people formed relationship and community in public space. This journey proved both challenging and unnerving

and took great courage. To make such steps involved a personal journey of individuation and not everyone was willing or able to do this.

To make any progress at all required that the journey was grounded communally. Personal change was dependent on and embodied by communal transformation in two ways:

- It was communal practices that enabled the personal journey towards the other in the public space.
- People found that they needed to create new "communal vehicles" to embody their new identity and narrative and to keep them accountable to a new way of being in the public space.

This led me to conclude that Christian maturation is shaped through engagement with the other in the public space, involving a subtle interplay of the personal and the communal. It was the impulse of a non-colonizing missional approach which prompted the engagement with the other that was the prerequisite for such embodied communal maturation.

Individualization

Conceptualizing individualization

Ulrich Beck summarizes individualization as "how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*" (1992: 137). Our propensity to look for personal solutions to systemic problems in all walks of life, not least in the church, blinds us to the cultural and communal nature of profound change. Our default response is the assumption that individuals carry both the responsibility and the potential to create change in their own lives and that the task of formation – however this is perceived – is theirs alone.

Historically, individualism has taken different forms. In the early modern period, the commitment to rationalism generated an instrumental individualism in which "rational mastery" is understood in terms of "instrumental control" (Taylor, 1989: 149). Instrumental reason objectifies the other and from here it is but a short step to use the other as the object of one's subjectivity – "a solipsistic concept of self whereby the embodiedness of the other is something to escape, possess or control" (Irigaray, 2000: 30–39).

However, the romantic reaction to rationalism generated a new shape to the individualism, without abandoning other forms. Taylor (2007: 473) describes this as "expressive individualism" in which the tendency to use people for one's

own ends is overlaid with an almost moral imperative to form oneself through one's personal and private choices and relationships; something he describes as "the ethics of authenticity" (Taylor, 1991: 29).

This expressivism is set within the wider parameters of instrumental control, what Taylor describes as the "buffered, disciplined self" (2007: 476). In contrast to the "porosity" characteristic of earlier ages, he argues that the "buffered self" is a boundaried and autonomous self, grounded in disengagement; a mind-centred personhood, which is self-referential (2007: 25–54). Such "disengagement" may not be "hospitable to a sense of community" (2007: 42).

This reading resonated with the data from the established patterns of church life in my research context, where I observed the tendency to use the other in the process of one's own formation. This should not necessarily be understood as a cynical act, more a cultural norm or expectation. Furthermore, the swirling currents of individualism in contemporary culture, make it extremely difficult for Christian communities to form public identity with the other who is different in their wider communities – something that was a characteristic of the communal life of the church.

Individualization in practice

How did this manifest itself in the research context? I ran a series of focus groups with the existing home groups to explore their understanding of growth and development and their engagement with the PMC process.

Members understood the purpose of the home groups as a means of developing their personal learning and knowledge as revealed in this group discussion:

E: More recently we've shared the leading; each of us have taken one of the sessions and led it. I think that's a massive step forward for people who are just not used to doing that.

They felt that in this approach each one has a chance to prioritize their learning:

JJJ: I think we should probably have "knowledge" because there is no point in any of it, unless you know what it's all about.
MMM: Your growth. You've got to grow in the knowledge.
GGGGG: Yes. You've got to.

They also saw them as places of mutual support for personal formation – especially in the challenges of life – a kind of therapeutic individualism. One person said:

> GGGGG: I've been through some really tough times. And if it wasn't for these guys, I probably wouldn't be here today. It was so tough and if it wasn't for when I found friends within this group … and they've supported me and they've helped me.

Of 55 comments about home groups:

- 24 were about mutual support.
- 21 were about learning and prayer.
- 2 were about the wider church.
- 4 were about disappointments with the home groups.
- Only 4 had any reference to the wider community.

Members would in theory welcome new members, but because of the inward-facing and privatized nature of the groups, none had welcomed new members during the last five to seven years, bar one person in one group very recently. They saw these groups as safe spaces and some were honest enough to say that they did not want new people because it would disturb the trust that they had developed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people on the outside of these groups within the wider church told me that they found these groups cliquey and inaccessible.

Interpreting this through the lens of individualization suggests that the groups existed to support people's needs for personal development and emotional sustenance. They gathered primarily as a group of individuals drawing on each other for support and strength. The bounded nature of a group of "buffered selves" is such that there was not enough sense of community to risk the penetration of those boundaries from unknown others.

When it came to outward focus of PMC, as I listened to the home groups it felt as if this journey was going on somewhere else – and they were either watching, resisting or ignoring it. Three of the groups were united in their opposition or passivity towards PMC and had almost no advocates for the process in their midst. Two of the groups were more positive and had individuals who had played a genuine part in the missional journey. However, even here, the process had made little impact on the group as a whole and people who were strong advocates of PMC practices in one-to-one interviews were concerned not to "rock the boat" within the group.

One of the most common ways of theorising this is Fowler's approach to faith development and what he describes as "stage 3": synthetic-conventional faith in which he argues we find and form our identity through dependence on significant relationships – conforming to the expectations and judgments of others. Fowler associates this with teenage years, but he admits that people may be processing what he calls "stage 3" in their 30s and 40s, something which leads many to be suspicious of the idea of "stages" if not towards the description of stage 3 that he offers (1981: 151–73).

Fowler argues that the weakness of this stage lies in the internalisation of others' perspectives for the sake of group identity (1981: 173). If this were all that was going on, then more open, porous groups would develop naturally as people grew out of the need for group think. The theory of individualization adds to Fowler's analysis a dimension which suggests that rather than being shaped only by the group, individuals create a group that protect the vulnerabilities of the buffered self from the unsettling other. Arguably, what Fowler is describing is less a stage of development and more an observation of what communal life looks like in an individualized culture. This certainly pictures well the character and relationships in the home groups. The groups defended their private world strongly in order to sustain their boundaries towards the other.

The journey outwards

Catching the imagination

In my doctoral thesis, I argued that, as a starting point, maturation in Scripture is at the very least communal as well as personal and that it is also other-centred in relationship both to God and people – something that becomes attenuated in a culture where a buffered self is the default pattern. However, Smith contends that porosity is the ontological nature of human beings and that "the reified Western ideal concept of the individual … has alienated us moderns from our 'essential species-being'" (2012: 60). If this is the case, then it is to be supposed that it would be possible to engage the imagination with a vision that challenges the buffered self of modernity – and this proved to be the case in my research context. Alongside the established, privatized life of the church, many (including a good number of home group members) were on a journey outwards to their wider community, which deeply engaged their heart and imagination. The following was spoken with energy and excitement by a church council member:

> If you had asked us at the beginning to find someone to talk to in the community we would have found it really difficult, but now we are falling over them.
> (Field Notes: 8–14.09.15)

Entering uncharted territory

PMC works with a number of what it calls "disruptive missional practices", which focus on attention to the other as subject, whether that other is God, or Scripture, or the human other – both proximate in the congregation and more distant in the wider community.

All of these practices involve the disrupting of privatized and individualized spiritual life. Dwelling in the world, for example, involves attending to the wider community and noticing the people that God brings across our path who we sense might be people of peace (a concept drawn from Luke 10.6) – people that we don't know well but whom we sense might share something of our values, vision and aspiration for the community where we all live. Having discerned this, the next step is to initiate a one-to-one conversation in public space – not to make a new best friend, but to discover a possible partner in the mission of God.

When they were first introduced to this practice, members of the congregation were paralysed by it and struggled even to make the first steps towards such conversations: it felt like entering uncharted territory – like the encounter with the giants in the Promised Land – "a land that devours its inhabitants" (Numbers 13.32-33).

Subsequent research on this practice has revealed the same uncertainties (Ladd, 2021). People spoke about the fear of their reception and their wariness about approaching people; one person spent three weeks of anxious anticipation before summoning up the courage to speak. She commented that she was "not a person who went out an talked about my faith a great deal". Another spoke of realizing that their faith "existed in a private space and not 'out in the street.'"

Anxiety about entering public space is reported consistently in the research and pictures what it feels like for people to challenge the cultural norm of the buffered self. Living in such a privatized and individualized culture means that steps towards the other in the public space are fraught with anxiety and uncertainty and need to be handled with care.

In PMC, communal missional practices disrupt individualization through the invitation and challenge to attend to the "reasonably friendly-looking stranger" whether in the church as we read Scripture together or in the wider community as we risk initiating a conversation with a person of peace.

The stranger is a source of anxiety in our culture – sometimes for good reason, often for no reason at all. One church member encapsulates this:

> RRR: Oh my word, some people aren't that confident that they can go and find a friendly-looking stranger, and how do you know they're friendly, anyway? Just because they're in the church, don't make them friendly, does it?

That is the embodiment of the buffered self!

The impact of instrumental and expressive individualism and the "buffered self" leads me to the conclusion that our cultural approach of using people in the task of personal formation is also a defence against the vulnerability of true engagement with the other. If maturity has always involved the ability to meet the other who is different, it becomes an even greater imperative in an individualized culture. Individualization leads to an attenuation of formation – whether this be using others within the church for our own formation or using those in the community as fodder for our evangelism. I am not saying that we approach this cynically as the language of "use" might imply, but that our individualizing approaches to discipleship and evangelism makes us blind to the potentially manipulative effect of this – something that is more than obvious to those on the receiving end.

A new way of being

Over the whole of the three-year PMC process, through listening to God and others, through meeting people of peace, through missional experiments with partners in the community, the church began to form a new sense of its missional vocation and identity. After much work together, the congregation articulated this as "Sharing Life with Jesus, with one another and with our communities", encapsulated as "Sharing Life".

This may not seem earth-shattering to the onlooker, but to them it was. It represented a move away from an instrumental approach of seeing others as the "targets" of their evangelism, which some saw as lacking in authenticity. Previously, their flagship missional activity was a holiday club – one person

described it as totemic – which absorbed a tremendous amount of time and energy throughout the year, yet which for many years had given people a sense that they were doing evangelism by bringing people into a church activity and putting on something for them.

It created a deep sense of community for those involved and so it took tremendous courage to question whether this really was having any lasting impact in the wider community and whether this was actually the way they, as a church, wanted to engage with that community. There was a huge struggle over this, which was still reverberating when I was with them. Was the calling to evangelise by bringing people into the orbit of the church or was it to form missional partnerships based on relationship and mutual spiritual discovery?

Their new sense of relational partnership with people led them to view people differently and to view mission differently – seeking to journey with their "partners of peace" in faith rather than impose something upon them. One congregation member put it like this:

J: I think, previously, there was a sense that the church and the world beyond the church were a bit polarised. I think we have begun to see the wider community, not so much as people who we need to evangelise, but people who we need to be partners with.

This is a bold journey for an evangelical church to take – but it is one that has borne fruit in terms of broadening and deepening relationships with their community and more experiments in missional partnerships.[2] I received this comment from a member of the village's Community Group:

AAA: It's very different to anything I've experienced before in 45 years. I've never seen a church so actively involved in creating a sense of belonging without having to be religious – left to choose to believe. Believing in community – God working in community – rather than having to be a believer.

2. There is a wider question about the place of speaking in evangelism as well as listening. The place of this is implied in the use of Irigaray's idea of the third space – co-creation implies contribution by both. However, to see mission in terms of listening and partnership is such a huge shift for a Christendom church that this was their focus during the time I was with them. I have explored the question of the place of personal witness in the context of mutual and shared witness to the presence and activity of God elsewhere (Ladd, 2021), but there is room for further research on this with churches who have adopted a partnership approach to mission.

The interplay of the communal and the personal in the journey of maturation

Personal formation

Many people in the congregation followed a journey with the "other" in the wider community that led them beyond instrumental and expressive individualism to a more open and relational approach in which they came to understand mission less in terms of imparting what they already knew and more in terms of a shared spiritual journey of discovery in which they learnt to be differentiated enough to take seriously what others brought, whilst not being afraid to share their own insight. At the beginning of their PMC journey, an external interview team had pictured them as a well-defended castle – something which caught their imagination. A long-term member commented:

H: Right at the beginning they discerned that our church [had] a bit of a fortress mentality, and we didn't relate terribly well to those outside. There had been in the past, a sort of "them" and "us" between the church and community.

They engaged in some imaginative reflective journeys together called "balloon rides". And as they drifted over the parish envisioning a new world this is what they said:

> People imagined that in the future, because of increase in relationships and partnerships, the boundary between inside and outside church would become increasingly blurred. The Community would see "us" as part of "them" as opposed to "them and us". "We're doing this" would be owned by a greater mix of people.

Irigaray's work can help us to see why this can be construed as a journey of personal maturation. She argues that the male-dominated approach to the world treats all relationships as objects to a single subject, leading to the silencing and possessing of the other and the "reduc[ing] of the feminine to a passive object" (2000: 23). By contrast, intersubjectivity results from the embodied encounter of two subjects in which their generic distinctiveness, their story and personhood is respected. There is a mystery to the other which is not to be violated or controlled, but protected on a journey in which identity and mutual knowing is formed through relationship (2000: 17–29).

This journey to intersubjectivity involves an attentive effort, which she describes as the movement from “sensation” to “perception”. “Sensation” sees the other as an object. “Perception” is a deliberate choice to listen and not just to look. It is a journey in which we refuse to allow the relationship to be reduced to a single subjectivity, refuse to appropriate the other, but allow them to be “other” in embodied relationship (2000: 40–47). Furthermore, this journey of openness to the subjectivity of the other is one in which we must be prepared to guard that subjectivity in ourselves and in the other. The goal is not fusion but rather “a relationship between two subjects, the objective of which is to leave to the other his or her subjectivity” (2000: 51). This leads Irigaray to develop the idea of a “third space” – a silence in which there is room for genuine attention to difference, to the history of each, not least to the party whose history has most consistently been unheard (2000: 62–67).

Though Irigaray grounds her work in the objectification and silencing of the feminine in western culture, it is also possible to see the impact of the “monosubjective” in communal relationships in a congregation. She recognizes, if not develops, the implications of her approach to cultures and ethnicities (1999: 156; 2000: 57).

This move towards mutual, intersubjective relationships is a bold and risky one in an individualized culture with its grounding in the buffered self. Nevertheless, this was a personal journey for some in which they left behind the closed communal structures of their home groups, which they increasingly realized could not sustain the journey they wanted to make. This is akin to Fowler’s stage 4 (1981: 174–98) which involves a level of individuating (I prefer this to individuation) – which is well articulated in research on spiritual development from a psychodynamic perspective (Rizzutto, 1979: 41; Brokaw and Edwards, 1994; Hall and Brokaw, 1995; Hall et al., 1998; Hall and Edwards, 2002; Simpson et al., 2008).

There was a personal journey of maturation to be made in my research congregation in engaging with the other in public space – leaving behind both privatized spirituality and individualized approaches to mission. This is psychologically and spiritually challenging – and it needs good support. I want to argue that processes of communal maturation are central to that support.

Communal formation

Two factors proved significant in providing the communal formation that enabled personal and communal movement outwards in relational mission.

First, it was the practices that were introduced to them over the three-year PMC process; and secondly it was the new "communal vehicles" (as I termed them) that they created in order to support their new missional journey in public space.

Communal practices

Shared communal missional practices gave them the structure and support they needed to make their personal and communal journeys of change; the vicar used the word "scaffolding" to describe this supportive role. The practices that PMC introduces are deliberately disruptive of privatized community and the buffered self. Rather than imposition of or education for change, PMC follows a diffusion model in which people – influenced by one another – journey from awareness and interest in changing their practice through evaluation and experiment, hopefully to adopt new ways of being in relationship with each other and their wider community (Rogers, 2003; Keifert, 2006: 39–59; Rooms and Keifert, 2014: 20–24).

Discussing and reflecting on communal practices was central to people's conversations with me in interviews. For example, there were 60 positive comments about the practice of Dwelling in the Word – a practice of reading Scripture that privileges the voice of the other, something which began to give them confidence in their own understanding. Here are different reflections from two home groups:

TT: A new way of studying scripture which is much more equable and democratic and so people listen to one another.

C: [I] did not want to do Dwelling in the Word, hated the idea for lots of different reasons Partly it's about the preaching always comes from the front, because they've got the training, they've got the experience, why would I take it upon myself, where's the learning in that? Partly, it's about a sort of learning disability; [it] took a lot of conversations in the background, saying, "Okay, well actually, I've got the same thing you have, so we're on a level playing field, that's fine."

The same practice generated 88 negative comments.

RR: So, if you just give somebody a piece of Scripture and they look at it and think, "Well, I'm not sure I've got anything. I can't see anything

that I can say to Fred Bloggs here." "Actually, that's helped me." So therefore you can feel embarrassed.

NN: [We're] frightened to make a mistake, frightened of misinterpreting what [we've] read, being incorrect, and then being hauled up for it.

Conflictual debate is a sign of diffusion and evidence of a maturing process in which people take responsibility for and own their views. It is a further mark of maturation when people gave give room to the thoughts and feelings of others and meet together in what Irigaray describes as a third space.[3]

This picture of diffusion is evidenced to a greater or lesser extent in their discussions of the other communal practices. These practices gave them a way to engage in the public space and form relationships with "reasonably friendly looking strangers" – as PMC puts it – who became their people of peace and partners in mission. Some members of the congregation embraced this with growing enthusiasm, whilst others remained cautious and suspicious.

New "communal vehicles"

Those who were embracing this more intersubjective relationship with their wider community began to recognise their need to ground these practices more in their communal life together. During Lent 2017, a number of the congregation took part in a series of meetings to explore how they might make their new sense of public engagement more secure in the church's life. Gradually they felt their way to the need to create a new kind of small group in which their new vision of public Christian life could be embodied and in which they felt they could be accountable to one another for their journey with this; they called them "Connect Groups". I described these as new "communal vehicles". Three such groups were formed.

In reporting their experience with this, they noted that it helped them

- to be supported in and accountable for their vocations as public Christians;
- to become a porous community – welcoming new people, especially those on the fringe of church life;
- to "share life" in ways that went beyond individualised community to something more holistic and communal.

3. There is not space here to discuss this particular journey with conflict and difference at greater depth here; it will be the subject of a later article.

They saw these groups as a way of normalising relationship with the other and having a consistent practice of welcome. One lay leader described it like this:

K: Because you just share what you do … You become intentional about spending time with people and the people you think God's calling you to. We've got a couple coming along who we didn't know their names. NNN went … "I've said you're welcome to come to the group but I don't know their names from Adam …" I said, "What are your names? Do you want to come this week?" And they started coming, and they are on the periphery of church.

The interplay of the communal and the personal

What their journey outwards with the other demonstrated was that this individuating journey is not the *leaving behind* of community as Fowler supposes, but rather the *re-forming* of community and the creating of new *"communal vehicles"* that can carry the new narrative identity of public mission and in which people can find support and accountability for a new way of being. The established home groups could not enable this because they were formed by a vision of privatized, individualized discipleship which created bounded as opposed to porous sets in order to protect what was seen as an environment of safety from the other.

Individuals needed to make a personal journey of maturation away from this closed vision of community – something which required a challenging engagement with individuation as Fowler proposes. But they also needed their communal life to enter a journey of change in order to support and sustain this new vision of life. They needed new communal vehicles to embody their new identity and narrative and in which to be accountable to others for their new public vocation as Christians. Without this journey of communal maturation – grounded in the engagement with disruptive communal practices – the personal transformation would, I suspect, have been short lived.

Conclusion

Now to return to where I began with the person who felt she needed to leave the church in order to grow. What was missing here both for her and for the church was a parallel communal journey of maturation which would have enabled

her personal journey of change. This journey involves an intersubjective relationship with the other and the impetus for this comes from a non-colonising approach to missional engagement, which sets the stage both for communal and personal transformation that goes beyond the self-focus of an individualized culture. The centrality of communal maturation to this lies in the fact that it is through communal practices that individuals are drawn into engagement with the other and to a public identity in the wider community where God is already present and active – thus drawing ever closer to the call to love both God and neighbour and to seek first the Kingdom of God.

By making this intersubjective journey with the other, my congregation member would have both been part of the church's missional journey, but also by engaging with difference could have found a context in which to explore the complexity of her own changing perceptions of life and faith. It would also, I believe, have helped that somewhat conservative church to become more hospitable to complexity, uncertainty and provisionality. On such an intersubjective missional journey with the other, the interplay of personal and communal maturation becomes a genuine possibility.

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Joyful disciples: A study of a missing link in considering spiritual disciplines and corporate missional habits

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Abstract

This essay takes up some suggestions for Christian formation found in the 'Life Model', a contemporary ecumenical project proposing attachment with God, inner healing prayer and healthy interpersonal relationships as key elements to promote psychological and spiritual change. In particular the significance of joyful relationship with God is considered, along with practices to cultivate this joyful relationship. Two practices are described which foster joyful attachment and thus provide ways in which character is shaped to enable Christian formation. However it is acknowledged that such formation also depends

for its full flourishing on other factors such as healthy ecclesial community and relational brain skills. The essay concludes by suggesting that joy-generating practices which can be developed as easily pass-on-able habits are a promising avenue by which to further enable Christian formation.

Keywords: joy, spiritual disciplines, formation, character, neuroscience

Introduction

Thirty years after he penned *Celebration of Discipline* (1981) Richard Foster wrote that while the task of reviving the conversation about Christian spiritual formation had been achieved, a second task of incarnating this reality into the daily experience of individual, congregational and cultural life had not been realized. The next 30 years, he argued, need to focus on this latter task. Easier said than done. Many are dissatisfied with the level of transformation they have actualized as a Christian community and as individual Christians. And while the glossy publications, the spiritual advice and the papers(!) on following Christ more closely keep coming, it seems that for the majority there are at best modest results. Nietzsche's old sneer that "I might believe in the Redeemer if his followers looked more redeemed" points to the relevance of this for missionary discipleship, as well as the long-term nature of this challenge. How can we grow the kind of Christian character that we find in the New Testament? How we can stay our mind on God, abide in Christ, set our minds on things above, set our minds on the Spirit, bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, glorify God in our bodies, renew our minds, have Christ formed in us and the like?

Research in this area is growing, not least through advances in neuroscience and experimental psychology. Here we will explore the place of Christian joy in growing such character, triggered by some suggestions presented by the 'Life Model', a contemporary ecumenical project proposing attachment with God, inner healing prayer and healthy interpersonal relationships as key elements to promote psychological and spiritual change (see for example Wilder et al., 2020: 49–64). This approach is rooted in developing Christian character through promoting joyful affective-relational experience which is strengthened by awareness of God's presence in daily life and the cultivation of an intentional, communicative relationship much like a close supportive adult relationship. This approach is not new but finds its place in a long tradition stretching back to Wesley, Teresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence and Pierre de Caussade and beyond, and we will utilize some of their insights accordingly.

The significance of joy

Why the privileged place of joy? First, the Christian narrative of creation, incarnation and incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity. This life of the Trinity is one of joy and it is this communion of persons bound together in mutual love, peace and gladness that we are invited to share in. We are created to be caught up in this, growing into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. If joy is God's life, a life of incomparable beauty, goodness and gladness, then to be rooted in this joy and live from it is our calling as God's creatures. Indeed, ecclesiologically Rowan Williams suggests that "the life of the Christian community has as its rationale – if not invariably its practical reality – the task of teaching us this: so ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy" (Williams, 1989: 3).

Moreover, as David Kelsey (2009: Vol. 1) shows, God relates to us in three interrelated but distinct ways which all elicit joy; as One who creates, grounding our reality, our value and well-being; as One who promises us eschatological consummation and draws us to it; as One who reconciles us in our multiple estrangements. Giftedness marks God's engagement with us and gift recognized as such, gratefully embraced affectively as joy.

Hopefully it will be clear from this that we are not proposing a Pelagian soteriology or elevating human agency as the means of realizing joy, which would be to lose sight of God as subject and with it the very relationship in which our joy is rooted. When the sister of Thérèse of Lisieux, Pauline, says that at the end of her life she will appear before God empty-handed, a prospect which saddens her, Thérèse responds:

> you are not like me, then, though we are both in the same position. Even if I had performed all the deeds of St. Paul, I would still consider myself an unprofitable servant; I would find that my hands were empty. But that is precisely the cause of my joy; since I have nothing, I shall receive everything from the good God. (Balthasar, 1992: 255–56)

Thérèse, a Doctor of the Church, gets it right – she is so bowled over by the good God's graciousness as to see being a recipient of this graciousness as her joy, her earthly labour being of no account in comparison. And unsurprisingly, a by-product is her little way which has been a huge inspiration to countless Christians.

Second, work in neuroscience and interpersonal biology by those such as Allan Schore (Schore, 1994) have identified the centrality of joyful attachments for healthy individual and group formation and the development of character. For the brain, attachment love is central and attachment develops through joy. Joy based in the love of God is a more complex affective-relational experience than the analogues that have been the focus of secular positive psychology research (e.g. subjective well-being or optimism). Schore showed how healthy systems involving joyful attachments informally model and teach positive interpersonal relational skills which promoted the formation of stable self-representations. Such skills helped community members handle suffering and relational conflict more effectively and tended to be self-propagating in healthy families and absent from more dysfunctional families. What is more, missing skills could be acquired in adulthood through establishing healthy relationships with securely attached individuals.

Third, assumed here is the approach as outlined by Buber, Levinas and others, which argues that human persons begin with and in encounter with others or in Charles Taylor's pithy saying that "we are human only in conversation" (Carrithers, Collins & Lukes, 1985: 278). It matters greatly then what quality and nature that conversation has because the genesis of the human mind is not something we accomplish individually but dialogically. Indeed as Susan Grove Eastman points out, for a young child "the experience of being imitated communicates a sort of recognition of oneself as distinctive and worthy of attention" (Eastman, 2017: 74). If a person is primarily constituted in personal exchange, such that other-relation mediates and grounds the person's self-relation, then if that relationship is one of joy (in being created, in being redeemed, in eschatological blessing), then one can begin to see how as Christian persons we might be transformed pneumatologically by means of intimate relationships created by the Spirit with God (Abba), Jesus and fellow believers.

Of course, this joy-fuelled transformation involves deformation as well as reformation, and Paul for example demonstrates precisely this reintegration of the whole person within a new intersubjectively constituted identity in relationship to Christ when he speaks of Christ's crucifixion as his crucifixion to the cosmos and the world's crucifixion to him (Gal. 6.14) and when he regards his own circumcision and membership of the tribe of Benjamin as excrement (Phil. 3.5; 3.8). Close readings of Paul show that this transformation is primarily corporate – it is not a matter of individual ontological change but rather of participation in a relational interchange larger than the self; as Eastman puts it "the newly constituted person 'in Christ' is intersubjective all the way down, in

relationship to Christ and in relationship to others" (Eastman, 2017: 173). This is the arena in which change happens (e.g. Rom. 12).

Fourth, joy-in-relationship as a focus prevents the divine–human relationship (and associated spiritual disciplines and corporate habits) being reduced to means of addressing human failure and correlatively of God being assumed to be the One whose utility consists merely of "saving" such beings by making them morally worthy. The latter view is inconsistent with the assumption that God relates to all that is not God, including human beings, in ways grounded in God's free, wise and generative love and not in human moral qualities. This avoids a potentially Manichean view of nature, anthropocentrism and a narrow soteriological focus on overcoming sin and making human beings acceptable.

Fifth, joy is intimately connected to mission scripturally. Mission can easily be spoken of as an additional burden to an already tired Church. Yet scripturally missionary discipleship was never a last-gasp desperate measure to prop up a dying institution, nor an exhausting corporate effort to keep Jesus' teaching going for future generations, in fact often it's not the disciples' work at all really – rather it's the fruit of a curiosity of outsiders provoked by a distinctively joyful and peaceful way of being among Jesus' followers, rooted in lively relationship with the God of creation, reconciliation and promised consummation.

What is joy?

If one asks in more detail, just what "joy" is, then one could say joy is a mode of being where, contrary to Western dualisms, we appreciate that thinking is acting, being is acting and, completing the circle, thinking is also being – which is to say that to think differently is to act differently which is to be different. Joy is a mode of being which is the result of experiencing and reflecting upon a level of goodness that is unmistakeable and irreducible in its unmatched ability to transform even our darkest hours. Unlike happiness which is conditional joy has the power to rise above and overwhelm any condition. This joy can be seen immanently in infants who respond with joy to being held, fed and stroked, as well as being experienced ourselves as simply as when welcomed with a smile. Joy is all the more deeply realized in relation to the fount of all goodness, that community of joy par excellence, the Trinity, in whom we find purpose, meaning and hope; so 1 Pet. 1.8-9, or again Jn 17.13.

Joy is not individualistic; rather, joy is attachment relationship, a good illustration being John the Baptist leaping in the womb at the proximity of Jesus

in Mary's womb. In infancy joyful interactions with primary caregivers shape the structure, chemistry and function of the brain, profoundly influencing our identity and relationships as we grow. Contemporary neurobiological models support loving attachment as the mechanism for maturity development and healthy interpersonal skills and the emotional energy behind loving attachment that develops both the attachment and the nervous system in the infant is joy. Few people can control this joy voluntarily and joy is amplified by the intersubjective interaction of two minds – relational joy rather than individual happiness builds attachments and emotional capacity. Neurologically, joy activates the brain's relational circuits in the middle of our identity centre, joy which can be realized in responding to the God who is with us, for us and glad to be so, interacting with our minds. God's initiating love enables us to receive his grace with appreciation and joy, generating a joyful identity. Indeed neurologically, the brain's joy centre – the right orbital prefrontal cortex – is the only section of brain which never loses its capacity to grow – so our "joy strength" can continue to expand through life.

However, observation suggests that while most Christians agree that God is a God of love who loves them, this belief is not reflected in the manifesting of relational joy or character transformation. Yet when a baby is loved by the mother, and that relationship between mother and baby is healthy, one can see the baby's character taking shape as a joyful, responsive, loving infant. Saints like Brother Lawrence echo this infant-like response to the mother in their response to God, Lawrence imploring us from his own experience to treasure the presence of God more than anything else. The consequences of such treasuring, treasuring like a baby treasures their mother's presence, like a lover treasures the beloved's presence are attested by other saints too – St Clare of Assisi for example asserting that we become what we love and who we love shapes what we become (Wilder, 2020: 74).

The issue then is cultivating the relational loving attachment. There is a difference between abstractly understanding God's love for us, and a conscious experience of a relational loving attachment fuelled by joy which shapes and re-shapes us. A focus on right belief, right doctrine and right choices, important as they all are, will not alone transform character and the rationalizations explaining this away (e.g. lack of faith) miss the point – character transformation depends on joyful attachment relationships of love. When we share joy, we become attached.

Character formation

Before going further let us briefly examine the idea of "character"; a rough description might be "the settled way of being and responding that a person has developed over time that becomes *characteristic* of them" (Copan, 2016: 8). McGilchrist in his *The Master and His Emissary* points out how the right hemisphere of the brain operates faster than the left hemisphere and is responsible for producing reactions to circumstances *before* we have a chance to consider how to react; thus the right hemisphere is a leading source of our character in that our reactions reveal the "natural", "settled" or "immediate" way of being and responding. So, Simon Peter revealed his character in the Garden of Gethsemane when he cut and ran. Jesus knew he would do this – Simon Peter had thought otherwise, or perhaps the left hemisphere of his brain had told him otherwise. The left hemisphere gets the details but not whole picture, operating like a flashlight, only seeing a bit at a time. Peter saw his virtuous fidelity to Jesus, consciously focusing his attention on such comforting possibilities while forgetting to monitor the rest of his character. (Inevitably, the hemispheres are deeply interrelated and we should not make simplistic assumptions about their respective roles – for example both hemispheres generate emotions, but analysis suggests the emotions generated primarily by the left hemisphere are caused by thoughts and beliefs whereas right hemispheric emotions include basic responses to life – thus joy and relationship can (re-)shape the latter while truth and action can (re-)shape the former.)

The trouble is that what we are utilizing right now as we think about this is by-and-large our left hemisphere, and getting at the right hemisphere by analytical thinking is a bit like trying to talk to a French child in Swahili. So what is the mechanism for building and changing our character in the highly influential right hemisphere? Sullivant suggests that

> because the right brain operates at a supra-conscious speed, the only way to engage with it and build it up is by relational/experiential/emotional/spiritual means. This is why many of the personal, physical, and relational practices seem very simple – even remedial – to many when they first begin to employ them. (Sullivant, 2018: 86–7)

So for example writers such as Brother Lawrence suggest with disarming simplicity the transformational significance of a conversational relationship with our Lord:

> the most holy practice, the nearest to daily life, and the most essential for the spiritual life, is the practice of the presence of God, that is to find joy in his divine company and to make it a habit of life, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him at all times, without rule or restriction, above all at times of temptation, distress, dryness, and revulsion and even faithlessness and sin. (Lawrence, 2009: 59)

One way of realizing Brother Lawrence's recommendations concerning practising the presence of God is, following "neurotheologians" such as Jim Wilder, to develop "mutual mind". Technically these states occur when dyadic resonance permits the intercoordination of affective brain states in the context of relationship, awareness and interest. (Note here Eph 2.10 with its description of human beings as God's *poiema*, where poetry in scripture does not rhyme sounds but thoughts – as God's poetry our thoughts can rhyme with those of our heavenly Father.)

More prosaically, consider the experience of knowing what someone is thinking. People you know well in your family – you can tell when they are amused, irritated, touched or bored stiff – you don't need them to tell you. Of course sometimes they will deny it, but that's the left hemisphere trying to hide what the right hemisphere, always moving at a faster pace, has already disclosed by body language and other signals. This experience some call "mindsight". Now when two people tune their mindsight on each other it creates a state of "mutual mind" – an intersubjectivity (as Schore describes it) – an example being that synchronicity with another's mind that we can see in a son and daughter as they glance at one another across the bed of their dying mother and don't need to say, or even consciously think, anything more at that moment. Experience shows that this kind of mind sharing is generally limited to people in a bonded relationship when they are face-to-face and open to emotional exchanges. (Indeed visual cues and voice tone are much more important than words for fostering such mind sharing.) Mutual mind state synchronizes brain activity and chemistry in a matter of seconds and runs too rapidly to be controlled by conscious thought or choice (which is why trying to hide your irritation with your beloved is usually futile). Although mutual mind states are mutually produced, the influence of the stronger brain can hold sway. Take the storm on the lake – the disciples had a mutual mind state together that they were about to be drowned so they woke Jesus. But he was relaxed and over time mutual mind with Jesus, a stronger mind, began to have an effect on the disciples. So

the next storm story, Peter could (briefly!) walk on the waves when he had his eyes on Jesus.

This mutual mind state is reserved only for those with whom we have a deep bond – and we cannot always tell in this state if it is our thought or theirs. In these states new aspects of our identity can be activated and shaped. It is a useful model for explaining how God acts without over-riding our freedom, as well as a way of responding to the apostolic injunction "let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2.2, 2.5). It is a deeply relational state which is reserved for "my people" – the people with whom I identify and to whom I am close. This sense of our group identity can be hugely influential and identity-forming with the power to change character because it operates in the fast track on the right spot in the brain. "My people" could be one's family, church or other group, though given how our face to face interaction has been massively reduced in recent decades, the opportunity for mutual mind states has also reduced.

Applying this to Christian character transformation, the idea is that we are to enter into a mutual mind state with God if we are to realize the kind of character transformation we aspire to as disciples. There is a big difference between thinking about God and thinking with God about reality – the latter is mutual mind state – and thinking with God might just change even our initial reactions – thus changing our character.

These mutual mind states are established between us and our beloved, so to begin with we need to ensure loving attachments. How do loving relationships grow? Well if we observe how a baby's loving attachment grows, it does so from joyful and thankful, appreciative interactions. (Notice again Brother Lawrence wrote of the practice of the presence of God as one that is to "find *joy* in his divine company".) So if we are serious about character transformation in Christ, the place we need to start and strengthen is these high-joy, loving relational interactions with Christ. Many of the saints understood this, as in Teresa of Avila's words (Ladinsky, 2002: 76);

> *Just these two words He spoke*
> *Changed my life,*
> *"Enjoy me".*
> *What a burden I thought I was to carry –*
> *A crucifix, as did He.*
> *Love once said to me "I know a song,*
> *Would you like to hear it?"*
> *And laughter came from every brick in the street*

And from every pore
In the sky,
After a night of prayer, He
Changed my life when
He sang
"Enjoy me".

One easy practice that can assist here is interactive gratitude (see Wilder et al. 2020 for more detail on this and the next practice of Immanuel journalling).

Practice 1: Interactive gratitude

1. Start by recognizing God's presence at this moment. Find something specific for which to give thanks to God, write it down and stay with the appreciation for 2 minutes or so, describing it in detail to God. Notice how your body responds to thankfulness.
2. Ask God what he would say to you and write this down. Be open to thoughts, images and sensing.
3. Read it to a (perhaps weekly) group you consider safe and trustworthy (and the number one rule for the group is to treat every weakness tenderly).

The interaction between God and us in this exercise is the defining difference between interactive gratitude and what we commonly consider as appreciation or giving thanks. It is part of building a mutual mind state with God – think of the analogy of taking a ball of yarn, holding one end and throwing it to someone who throws it back, repeatedly. As the ball goes back and forth the connection grows thicker and stronger. Furthermore, a handy tip to ensure the right brain stays involved is to be aware of body sensations and to feel some sort of connection with God in one's memory. Increasing joy through effective gratitude practices can actually help us reset our default state more to joy over time – for example try repeated exposure to a state of gratitude three times a day for five minutes recalling gratitude memories and observe the results.

This practice is purposely simple and modest. And, as with the next practices, there will be some nervousness about this exercise that we are putting words and thoughts in God's mouth and indeed sometimes we are, and it is important to check our impressions against scripture and Jesus' teaching and character, whether it brings good fruit (Mt. 7.20), whether it results in shalom and/or gratitude (Col. 3.15). Other checks could be listed and while we are

always fallible, the possibility of misunderstandings should not deter us from seeking joyful conversational interaction.

Sharing with others is crucial, encouraging others and tutoring one another in recognizing God's voice. Hearing oneself articulating gratitude also increases the likelihood of future recognition of gift. Furthermore, articulating gratitude completes the process with positive relational interaction and it builds memories of God's goodness that convey a sense of being loved.

Our working assumption here is that our identities are formed primarily not by choices but the relational bonds we experience and reflect upon – so that who we share mutual mind states with will shape our choices much more than the other way round – think for example of anyone in love and how they will be ready to change schools, politics, friends, religion – the brain is much more concerned with what we love than our freedom of choice. It seems that the right hemisphere, the major domain of attachment relationships, can have a much more direct control and influence on our identities and character than the left hemisphere – and that our identities and emotions are only indirectly influenced by the thoughts and choices generated by the left hemisphere. Rather what really shapes character and identity is it seems in the right hemisphere, the appreciation, joy and shalom (or lack of them) that grow from attachments and relationships, those to whom we are attached shaping our character and identity as a result.

The habit of interactive gratitude strengthens our relational bond with the divine and this issues in joy and joy builds our loving attachments, which attachments arguably influence our character development more than anything else.

A second practice here which further strengthens the attachment relationship with God is Immanuel journalling. Critical here is how we are assuming God sees us; this approach presumes God is present, is truly good and perseveres in seeking good for us, just as for example when God tells Moses that he sees, hears, cares and is with his people and will do something for them (Exod. 3.7-8).

Practice 2: Immanuel journalling

Begin writing as God simply says back to you what God *sees and hears* from your speech and actions (e.g. I hear you crying quietly, unsure about what to do, doubting me).

Continue with God *recognizing* unspoken words (e.g. I hear you judging yourself, your quiet resolution).

Write as God *understands* how big (hard) this is (e.g. I can see how sad you are about this).

Write as God *is glad* to be with you and treats you tenderly (e.g. I am with you, for you and glad to be here in this with you; indeed, we grasp that God is "as-glad-as-glad-can-get" to be with us, joy grows).

Write as God saying we *can do* something together about this (e.g. I am with you and know we can move forward in this together).

(This is all about 'thought rhyming' with God where God restores our relational circuits using the sequence I see you, I hear you, I understand how hard this is, I am glad to be with you, I can do something about what you're going through. There is attention, validation, comfort and peace).

The final step is sharing such a journal entry within a small group setting. The aspiration is that when we share stories of appreciation and God moments in journalling we move into a deeper group identity. By telling others what we appreciate about God's presence we are keeping our relational circuits on, tutoring and being tutored on God's presence and sharing joy which builds group identity. Of course, there needs to be group guidelines to such sharing, the number one ground rule being to treat every weakness tenderly, our own and that of others.

One way of discerning God at work here is by considering whether the fruit is shalom. We have all had stories told us that have drained our joy, failed to bless us and not been helpful. One way of weighing a journal entry's readiness for group sharing is via a shalom check. Testing for peace might include looking for (a) a shift in perspective that 'feels' closer to God's reality, (b) what is written matches scriptural principles c. consideration of a simple question such as "when I think of Jesus in this moment do I feel an authentic sense of his love for me and a growing desire to serve others?"

This second practice is about both joy and peace. Along with high-energy joy there is joy's sister, peace. We cannot sustain a high-energy state for long and neurologically experiences of joy call for a time of rest to follow – joy followed by shalom. Shalom is that powerful rest that comes when we know everything "fits", there is nothing to worry about, shalom in God's active presence to us in Jesus through the Spirit. Neurologically joy is a high energy state that builds our strength and stimulates growth, while shalom is a low energy state that quiets us when everything is just right and we can rest (Mt. 11.28-30). Joy gets things done. Shalom lets us be still and it entails flourishing and wholeness. Shalom

is where everything is in right relation, the way things ought to be, and God is pleased. Indeed, the sharing in this practice is akin to passing the peace – a sharing which ideally involves the three ingredients of gratitude, noticing what God wants me to know and describing what's changed.

This practice suggests we do not come by shalom by believing the right things or by solving problems so much as by sharing God's mindsight. An outstanding example is the martyr Stephen as he was being killed. When we look at Stephen, Paul or a host of other Christian witnesses we find certain elements of this approach, not least (a) God is always with us; (b) God actively interacts in our lives; (c) connecting with God comes before focusing on upsetting experiences (in our case) or traumatic experiences (in Paul and Stephen's case such as imprisonment or martyrdom); (d) full processing of such experience requires upset *and* relationship with God to be active in mind at same time, the latter reshaping the former.

This is of course not easy; to be asked in the middle of our strop, sulk or spite to recall God's presence, closeness and what God had done for you till you become thankful – that's tough. One hint for cultivating shalom here is going slow; as Brother Lawrence puts it,

> we must do all that we do with thoughtfulness and consideration, without impetuosity or haste, both of which show an undisciplined spirit; we must work quietly, placidly and lovingly before God, and pray him to approve our toil, and by this continual attention to God we shall break the Demon's head, and make his weapons fall from his hands. (Lawrence, 2009: 59)

Peace of course does not mean we will not suffer, only that no suffering will separate us from the love of God (Rom 8.35-9).

The wider context

The two modest practices mentioned here are not stand-alone; their effectiveness depends on considerable maturity among the members of groups in which they are practised and healthy ecclesial community. Space does not permit further exploration but in environments where people are heavily defended, self-justifying and wearing masks to protect weaknesses, a low-joy environment beckons. Weakness is essential in joyful, ecclesial community because mutual joyful bonds require vulnerability. Self-protection is rooted in fear, not joy, and

it does not grow joyful community. Character grows when, for example, we build joy with one another in weakness. Low-joy communities are usually those where weaknesses are hidden, disguised and indeed despised. Furthermore, in Christian community it's not "weakness is bad and with God we can be strong" but that God's power makes it safe to be weak while God is strong. Other roots of low-joy include a lack of development around the "big" emotions such as fear, anger and shame, unresolved trauma and lack of face-to-face interaction.

Another key element to the effective working of the practices mentioned is what might be termed relational brain skills. Again, space does not allow much further discussion but take for example the skill of "sharing joy".

We learn "sharing joy" from people who are glad to be with us, whose eyes shine as they look at us – their body language, tone of voice and words all convey "it's a delight to engage with you". Relational joy empowers, motivates and fuels us. We feel a reward with this joy – the neurotransmitter dopamine playing a part in this. The brain's reward circuitry releases this dopamine also when we eat, exercise, have sex and give generously. And the same dopamine tells us we then need a breather, to rest and recover. And after we catch our breath it is time for the serotonin to recharge us for joy. You may say this skill is "easy" but it's not that apparent that our Christian communities are filled with this skill of sharing joy. Very often when our joy levels drop we don't employ this skill but instead substitute behaviours, experiences, events, people and substances that hijack the joy mechanism of the brain and artificially regulate our feelings, stimulating the dopamine etc. You can tell the difference because this dopamine leaves us restless and empty. We can substitute joy with activities, sports, films, laptops, busyness and endless distractions. Surely many of these things aren't bad but good, but we should realise we are missing out in not developing this skill.

It is also embarrassingly easy to enhance this skill. One minister decided to introduce this skill together with the returning to quiet skill by training welcomers to express joy with their face and voice, and also to recognize when people felt overwhelmed. So welcomers could provide joy or shalom as needed. The results were remarked upon after just a few Sundays, people speaking of services being "life-giving" and refreshing (Wilder et al., 2014: 116).

Another skill is "returning to joy", restoring our desire and ability to be with others when things go wrong and we are suffering or in pain. Returning to joy comes from strong attachments to others and a deep sense of who we are that will not get lost when we are in pain. While we are still distressed and not "joyful" there is a sense of quieting distress and being with caring other(s).

Concluding remarks

"Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God," wrote Léon Bloy (1937: 57), a French Catholic philosopher. Fostering the mode of being that is joy through habits of relational attachment is arguably one of the missing pieces in enabling our formation as Christ followers. It is not a stand-alone element however – shallow relational attachments, weak ecclesial community, lack of brain skills and low joy rooted in upbringing and bad habits are all obstacles to realizing God's gracious invitation to joy. The two practices mentioned here focused on joyful interactive conversational relationship are stimulated by engagement with Wilder et al.'s Life Model and they are suggestions to provoke discussion – what joy-generating practices can we shape and communicate as easily pass-on-able habits which can be undertaken together in ways which are genuinely transformative?

The joy we speak of is not primarily a psychological competency whose mastery is a necessary stage in our self-actualising project, neither is it some evolving product of a Hegelian historical-cosmic process, or any of a number of other modern possibilities rooted in voluntaristic human agency or natural dynamics. Rather joy's possibility is rooted in the God of joy who relates to us in creating, redeeming and drawing to eschatological consummation in ways which generate joy-in-relationship which can manifest even in situations which hold few possibilities for well-being in community, as demonstrated by Paul, Francis of Assisi and others.

What is more, this joy suggests participation in the joy of the triune God, the shaping of Christian community and character as the New Testament advocates, and promising missiological effectiveness through such a distinctive way of being together in God's presence.

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We want the good life now: Insights from lived religion for a whole person and communal approach to salvation in the twenty-first century

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Abstract

While late-modern people in contemporary western societies may be curious about salvation and have questions regarding the hereafter, they clearly long to achieve human flourishing here and now. To obtain this goal, special prominence is given to the affective dimension, embodied spiritual practices and personal experiences. At the same time, the Church in the west continues to insist on prioritizing cognitive word-based pedagogies and offers merely a marginal emphasis on experiential bodily participation. This strategy that highlights content over purpose has largely resulted in a diminished impact considering the significantly changed religious landscape. Consequently, this paper

intends to offer relevant insights from lived religion with its explicit emphasis on enacted theology as a communal source for catechetical instruction and the whole-body prioritization for a salvific encounter with God. Reflecting on these important aspects contributes to a more contextual and holistic understanding of how the Church can promote the good life now, while increasing its practical effectiveness in its traditional proclamation of God's salvation for the world.

Keywords: lived religion, salvation, secularism, human flourishing, embodiment, religious experience

Times have changed: Salvation for the here and now

Times are changing, and it appears that in the modern era this notion is not only true, but increasingly accelerating. While Europe has evidently been considered a mission field for decades (Paas, 2012: 45), the ever intensifying secularization process has continued to marginalize the influence and authority of Christianity as the principal blueprint for life and has inaugurated a widespread post-Christian worldview in the context of most western societies (Paas, 2011: 6). While in the past the basic assumption of a supreme and eternal transcendent reality dominated the landscape, today's age is characterized by a clear shift in plausibility structures, where it is completely feasible to live without reference to God. The material world has been intentionally divested of any compelling dependence on transcendent categories for obtaining objective meaning. God is viewed as merely one viable option among many. These changed conditions ought to compel Christians in the west to deeply rethink what the gospel and the lasting message of salvation might be within this post-Christian setting and develop a creative vision of how best to present the unchanging biblical story considering the new circumstances.

The beginning of this transformation can be broadly traced back to the Reformation, and from there through Enlightenment philosophy until the present time (Gregory, 2012). With the permission to abandon the perceived constraint of institutional religion and any perceived guilt regarding the burden of spiritual responsibility coupled with the ensuing emancipation of the individual, disbelief had no longer significant social repercussions. Established rules or fitting into a cultural order that provided a certain sense of identity was replaced with unprecedented personal freedom. Salvation shifted from participation in the life of the Church to the independent activity of attaining personal fulfilment and happiness (Rooms, 2018: 102–103). The notion that people are in

their essence worshipping beings was firmly negated. Not only has the need for God incessantly decreased, but the abolition of God has even been considered by some as a necessary precondition for genuine fulfilment. The basic claim is that the rejection of God and the acceptance that human beings are alone in the universe represents the ultimate expression of bravery and the requirement for actual freedom (Rollins, 2012: 201–202). Even for those who chose to continue participating in religion as one legitimate option among many, this has been manifestly reduced to a private endeavour, where acceptance by God no longer depended first and foremost on institutional Church membership and demands for creedal affirmation. Instead, religion needed to conform to a private vision about the world and the inner judgment of the individual about the ultimate meaning of life. Long-standing concepts such as sin, confession, and redemption, all became personal categories that encouraged an individualistic form of faith that would have been inconceivable to previous generations.

This privatization and internalization of faith resulted in the reduction of external, cultic practices and the migration of spirituality to where believing became an inner, intellectual category, which occurred somewhere within, deep on the inside of the autonomous independent thinking subject. People increasingly began to believe that they were finally liberated from cultic constraints and clerical authority and were now not only responsible, but also able to make their own decisions and shape their own destinies. The vision of human flourishing became the end goal. The premise that individuals were perhaps unable to save themselves became incomprehensible, thereby further depreciating the need for ecclesiastical communities and divine assistance. But is transcendence a threat, or perhaps the only satisfying response to the perpetual longings of the human heart? Perhaps it is possible to represent the of role the Church less as an institution of repression, and more of a communal journey of transformation. Nevertheless, this remarkable development of private autonomy and trust in the boundless potential of humanity combined with the simultaneous decline of belief in eternal life and the need for God, resulted in the attempt to construct meaning and significance through personal effort without any reference to a transcendent reality.

God has in effect ceased to be part of the daily way of life for a majority of late-modern people, while individual worth and a successful existence is now primarily sought within the boundaries of an immanent framework (Seel, 2018). Long-established concepts such as sin, redemption and salvation, that for centuries carried inherently agreed defining characteristics, have been reinterpreted and have taken on new meanings. This secular re-appropriation of familiar terms reveals fundamentally changed assumptions that must be taken

seriously. For instance, while most theologians would agree that the doctrine of salvation entails certain promises and benefits in this world it must also by necessity await its final fulfilment in the future. Such a predetermined soteriological postponement, however, has ceased to be considered good news (Paas & Schaeffer, 2021: 334). The enduring human dilemma and profound quest to discover the underlying meaning of life abandoned any post-mortem conceptions and focused predominantly on the present actualization of human flourishing. For this reason, the ultimate spiritual, and presently non-tangible aim of salvation gradually transformed into a search for immediate satisfaction in everyday life and the concrete achievement of human happiness today.

While contemporaneous flourishing in daily life is certainly also anchored deep within Christian theology, traditional approaches have until now tacitly assumed that our dialogue partner shared a similar view about a transcendent existence. This constitutes a methodological hurdle and exposes an inadequate understanding of the changes that have taken place. We need a renewed imagination about ultimate meaning and human flourishing in order to develop a viable response to the self-sufficiency that is characteristic of today's secular societies. The new circumstances of a disparate accentuation regarding the location and exact timing of salvation's manifestation assuredly represents pressing interpretive as well as communicational challenges that must be addressed and overcome. It has become indispensable to stop speaking past the listeners. The contemporary Christian understanding of salvation and other relevant theological categories is clearly confronted with a reordered western culture, thereby necessitating an intelligible representation of what it means to be saved. Added to these significant changes has been the pluralization and resultant relativization of traditionally established truth claims.

In our secular age there is an overwhelming number of possible choices for belief. Modern people may perhaps be unable to determine absolute truth but that is acceptable assuming that the freedom to independently choose remains. The Kantian notion that equivocated freedom with limitless choice appears to dominate secular thinking. The emancipation from perceived constraints that inevitably leads to a wide diversity of possibilities is readily preferred, even if the consequence is a pronounced fragmentation and a high probability of uncertainty (Noble, 2018: 54). As long as people are free to choose according to an inner standard, the intrinsic essence of the object of belief or its correspondence to axiomatic norms remains secondary. Objective facts are now individually determined, where each person is entitled to being the locus of absolute meaning. Flaws in basic beliefs and the resulting dissonance is hardly troubling, since there are always new ideas and additional evidence to consider. And since truth

is perceived to essentially be subjective and geared towards pragmatic results, choosing a loose patchwork of beliefs that periodically contradict one another does not necessarily require rational congruency.

Moreover, due to globalization, the multiplication of diverse options and an indefinite number of contested possibilities, that which is real must ultimately be determined by the independent authority of either the individual or a cohesive community of individuals. This democratization of truth, where the opinion of the majority assumes the prerogative to determine what is right, has further contributed to the erosion of previously held common ground. Certainty about right and wrong is perpetually questioned and traditional binary thinking largely discredited as an inferior approach to comprehending reality as a whole and successfully navigating through life. Knowledge about ultimate truth inescapably remains partial and actual lived experience suggests a perpetually continuing modification of perspectives on the world. Seel suggests that the essential attitude for modern people is that they believe that, "Pure truth is an abstraction, not a lived experience" (Seel, 2018: 49). Instead, what is important is to live authentically according to an ongoing internal and progressive process of discovery, rather than submit to any external dogmatic propositions.

Truth has essentially migrated from an external objective reality, which was for centuries fundamentally informed by the Christian story, to its current location on the inside, where "safe within our heads, we interpret what is good, what is true, what is beautiful, and who we are" (Noble, 2018: 89). While this interiorization of truth by self-reliant and self-confident individuals has been part of modern culture for some time, the current constellation that continues to elevate individual independence at the expense of any collectively accepted foundational and permanent axioms, has resulted in deepening the rift between past assumptions and the present reality. This unique combination of a desired immediacy of salvation that is principally expressed through this-worldly goals, with previously accepted facts becoming subjective and internal, has led to the complete prioritization of pursuing personal well-being and momentary pleasures (Sayers, 2010: 19). Simply put, a particular form of pragmatic expediency has for secular people become the essential guiding principle for determining reality. The natural consequence of the relativization and subordination of truth to the fluctuating preferences of individuals has been an increased insistence on the guiding role of experiences in their supposed ability to detect and confirm the authentic.

The logic is clear. If definitive certainty is denigrated and perpetually mixed with doubt, and absolute external objective meaning ultimately unattainable, then a decisive strategy must be employed to find other reliable sources that

offer explanatory assistance and orientation to make sense of reality. For this reason, the only valid approach to transcend human limitation and apprehend genuine truth is to rely on subjective affections and experiences. The dependability of a rationally assumed philosophical worldview or the correctness of a particular external object of belief has become subordinate to the principle of expressive individualism and the strength of genuine individual feelings (Smith, 2014: 88). The fundamental search for axiomatic truth that would be congruent with rational categories was replaced with the pursuit of happiness, which was, "attainable through all sorts of experiences which, even if chosen, must be felt to be enjoyed" (Marsh, 2018: 19). The process of authenticating reality must consult individual feelings. In this way, affective experiences are no longer considered a by-product of engaging in certain spiritual practices or the implicit result of intrinsically meaningful action, but rather the determining standard that necessarily legitimizes all authoritative claims truth. Strictly speaking, if the felt experience is meaningful, authentic and positive, then there is a greater inclination to believe the theoretical content. Stories, the imagination and emotional impressions consequently trump abstract reflection.

Considering the enduring reality of this changed landscape, where late-modern people display vastly altered views on life, meaning and salvation, then how should the Church respond? If human agency is viewed as self-sufficient and responsible for attaining the good life now apart from any divine assistance and if the inherent implication of what the gospel actually represents is left to each individual for personal interpretation, then traditional methodologies of communication are inherently restricted. Moreover, if emotions and the longing for immediate human flourishing eclipse propositional content and the promise of an anticipated fulfilment in the hereafter, then contemporary Christian efforts to reach today's secularized population with a convincing message of God's salvation for the world must be realigned. To properly respond to these important challenges and advance constructive suggestions for future ecclesial practices, it is important to first offer a brief overview of the currently dominating strategy. Following this limited analysis, I will introduce salient insights from research in the field of lived religion. In the final section, these insights will be further explored for the purpose of finding holistic and potentially more effective approaches to achieve the long-term overall aim of succeeding to convey the Christian conception of salvation and the good life within the secular context of contemporary society.

Salvation: A good story needs more than words

In the previous section I argued that the typical leitmotif for most Western culture is a pronounced longing for instant happiness and well-being that fundamentally depend on affective experiences to be considered authentic. For salvation to be good news, it is expected to be both pragmatic and immediate. Additionally, since axiomatic demarcations of objective truth are continuously shifting and ultimately contingent on autonomous acceptance by independent individuals, rational categories, and cognitive-based approaches as the primary means of transmitting religious content in contemporary pluralized society have increasingly lost their effectiveness. A word-based approach, where individuals can remain safely within the boundaries of the interior intellectual self, freely able to accept or reject propositional claims to truth appears to be less than optimal. Seel explains, "Much of our pedagogy is head, heart, and hand, or observation, interpretation, and application, when just the reverse is actually how we learn: hand, heart, and then head" (Seel, 2018: 19). It appears that theoretical ideas are best comprehended and internalized through the transformational power of embodied participation.

This is precisely what Butler argued, saying that theology is essentially embodied in practices and that "the distinction drawn between participating and thinking begins to erode as thinking becomes about participation and participation becomes an act of discernment" (Butler, 2020: 287). Since texts and ideas are inherently dependent on concrete embodiment in time and space and there is a seeming inseparable hermeneutical connection between beliefs and practices, then any meaningful religious tradition ought to be able to satisfy both body and intellect. Consequently, there has been for many years an ecclesiastical wrangling with the question about finding an appropriate balance between Word and Sacrament (Ross, 2014). Does the cognitive acceptance of content based on words supersede the more multidimensional sensory experience of faith being expressed through a variety of external means? While there certainly has been a recent tendency to reemphasize certain liturgical elements within Protestant churches (Rempel, 2020), the spoken words still remains the predominant approach. Carefully choreographed ritual enactments have been largely replaced with a particular message that can be grasped with the mind. Verbal discourse takes precedence over bodily participation.

There are several examples of this attitude. For instance, Cronshaw and Barnett pointedly disapprove of the prevalence of word-centrism that is especially evident in today's seminary education, saying, "Words, and words about words, are the currency of theological education" (Cronshaw and Barnett,

2017: 5). The role of the body as a significant locus of religious learning has been mostly disregarded. This is unfortunate since true spirituality cannot be reduced to a cerebral exercise. The teaching of doctrine that neglects a holistic engagement with embodied practices will be severely limited to achieve its intentions, for it is paramount to enable practitioners to relate theological insights to a pragmatic understanding of how this may affect their everyday lives (Chan, 2006: 67). Another example of the pervasive attention on words and texts, often combined with an implicit anti-liturgical stance, is hardly anywhere more discernible than in many of the sermon-centric worship services, where knowledge about God typically depends on the communicative skills of gifted speakers, who are trained in the mastery of verbal exposition. In tandem with several other important developments, the evolution of the sermon as the main pedagogical and spiritual tool to comprehend God also has its roots in the Reformation, where "the rise of the word was at the expense of the use of the body in worship. Benches and pews took up space that would previously have been available for the movement of people in procession or for kneeling in prayer. Worship became increasingly a rational exercise" (Senn, 2012: 45). Knowing God through a holistic, co-participatory, bodily engagement gradually decreased in favour of passive listening with the predominant goal of cognitive comprehension.

While it is certainly possible to attain spiritual insights and succeed in reaching certain religious experiences through a left brain, word-based emphasis, this rational orientation also suggests a somewhat incomplete understanding of what it means to be human, since it is ultimately unable to reach the whole person. It also reveals the reoccurring tendency towards a dualistic, even reductionistic view of material reality, which tends to have "a very partial view of the human person" (Crawford, 2015:8). It is obvious that people are far more than thinking beings that can be satisfied by verbal concepts and abstract ideas. This viewpoint does not exclude rationality as one legitimate element among others that can certainly nurture devotion and facilitate a meaningful religious experience. The critique is rather directed toward the asymmetrical emphasis that reveals certain insufficiencies. What needs to be reassessed is the implicit assumption that views cognition as automatically superior to all other ways of attaining spiritual fulfilment and knowledge about God. A more balanced and holistic understanding requires a deeper anthropological affirmation of the interconnectedness of the physical body as a necessary vehicle for the transmission of religious truth. Becoming fully human is fundamentally an invitation to go beyond a rigid mind-body dualism that often disregards the significance of the body and the implicit embodied nature of all theological knowledge.

Yet despite these important insights and especially considering the contemporary context where people demand an integrative and pragmatic vision of life, the Christian tendency continues to be an emphasis on the content of faith, while undervaluing the critical prominence of its purpose and function. For instance, it appears more common to answer what salvation means in terms of its doctrinal implication or an eschatological future, rather than what its precise purpose is for the here and now. Marsh argues, that is crucial to strive toward a considerable reorientation in the Christian communication about how salvation is understood and to "address the question of what salvation means for the present" (Marsh, 2018: 209). If salvation is principally tied to an abstract story about the next life, then it will have foreseeable difficulties to compete in the pluralized marketplace of multiple stories that confidently proclaim flourishing in this world. This in no way denigrates the significance of the Christian story and its promise of salvation that is made available through faith in Christ. Revelation and God's Word are crucial for helping people to understand their deep-seated hungers and hidden hopes. Words and ideational content remain decisive in addressing people's true identity, perceptions about the world, and the intense longings of the heart, which ultimately can influence their decision-making and behaviour (Smith, 2013).

Even for thoroughly secular people, stories are foundational to make sense of this world (Roberts, 2020; Glasson & Marsh, 2019), which is why it is important for Christians to continue to tell their version as convincingly as possible. The essential nature of any religion or worldview is to persuade others that their story and vision of the ultimate good life is worth believing, which is why, "religious stories are not necessarily different in kind from the other stories we tell" (Marsh, 2020: 53). The challenge remains, however, that the Christian story ought to go beyond its proclivity to overemphasize words and theological assumptions and take seriously the whole person. This includes individual passions, experiences, and a profound embodied existence. The story cannot be limited to eternal life beyond the grave but must include quality of life and flourishing now. Prioritizing these elements and pursuing an intentionally holistic aspiration to inspire people's imagination is precisely what has always made up the core of any lived religion. A brief examination of some of the foundational areas of emphasis within the framework of lived religions can therefore help to provide important insights for the Christian approach in its attempt to recalibrate the way of presenting its message of salvation within the current circumstances.

Insights from lived religion on salvation and the good life

Research on lived religions has been a well-established discipline within religious studies for many years (Ammerman, 2021). Rather than looking at religion through texts, it investigates how ordinary people apply theological concepts and beliefs in their everyday lives and within their specific local context. Since it is too vast a field to discuss in any detail here, I aim to focus on merely two relevant and hence important ideas. Lived religions due to their fundamentally pragmatic orientation deliberately allocate special attention to genuine human flourishing and embodied experiences (McGuire, 2008). Aside from the theoretical content, the essential goal of believing and consequently applying religious values in day-to-day living is to generate a successful way of life. Religion does not solely correspond to verbal truths and cognitively derived spiritual insights, instead its cardinal function is to, "make us act and to help us live" (Durkheim, 1995: 419). In response to complex realities, uncertainties and significant challenges, people usually design common strategies across multiple settings in their attempt to attain meaning and contentment (Ammerman, 2014). When certain institutionally derived requirements and religious obligations hinder the achievement of these principal objectives, then religious practitioners quickly find creative ways of pragmatic reinterpretation and new ways to implement those aspects in order to ensure their personal well-being. Simply put, a system of normative beliefs is not always at the heart of religious behaviour. Ordinary people constantly engage in a negotiation process. Ambiguity, not rigid orthodoxy describes the distinctive nature of lived religion. The key common denominator, however, invariably remains the aspiration to the good life.

Liberation Theology scholars have known this for decades and have been quite critical of an individualistic, future-oriented understanding of salvation. For them salvation ceases to be good news if it fails to provide substantial deliverance from material lack as well as positive socioeconomic benefits in everyday life. As this debate rages on and both sides endeavour to achieve a more balanced perspective, the plausible dangers are evident. On one hand there exists the possibility of instrumentalizing religion for personal gain. That which is expedient and helpful could be viewed as more important than that which is true. This leads to a devaluing of theological norms and an overly positive view of human potential. The necessity for belief in traditionally upheld doctrinal content could eventually be replaced with social activism and liberation from all forms of oppression in this life, where improved relationships and

not regeneration become paramount (Morris, 2014). On the other hand, a too narrow view of salvation that does not sufficiently acknowledge the various dimensions that God intends to redeem in this world may become irrelevant. This is why "Christians need to believe that the gospel is not only relevant for our soul and in the afterlife, but also for our bodies, relationships, and our lives here and now" (Paas, 2021: 148). Although the conflict between the utilitarian aspects of salvation and the commonly assumed transcendent orientation continues to persist (Aždajić, 2021), it is important to take people's aspirations to flourish seriously. Lived religions understand that humans fundamentally long to thrive. Consequently, to attract followers it is paramount to provide an adequate response that satisfies these tacit desires. And one of the most significant, yet undervalued, ways to achieve this objective is to offer an explicit focus on affective experiences and an overtly embodied theology.

Lived religion recognizes that belief is not primarily cognitive or theoretical, but rather that it has an overtly physical dimension. Consequently, embodied expression provides an inviting platform for becoming more fully human by satisfying the desire for emotional contentedness and the need for concrete flourishing in this life. The reduction of theology to abstract concepts is essentially impossible because the human body is not only implicitly expressing theological content but is indispensable for theology's existence and its concrete articulation. Materiality is an essential element of any relevant religion and has a particularly strong grounding in Christianity, since the "Incarnation was not simply a theological premise, but a methodological practice" (Seel, 2018: 118). God taking on flesh is a biblically informed worldview that affirms that corporeality is not subordinate to rationally held beliefs. For this reason, a purely spiritual or ideational focus that overlooks the incarnational emphasis of the Christian faith will always remain inadequate. Bodies fundamentally define who we are and any religious narrative depends on bodily involvement. McGuire describes this as follows, "Human bodies matter, because those practices – even interior ones, such as contemplation – involve people's bodies, as well as their minds and spirits" (2008: 98). Especially within the contemporary context it is apparent that modern people clearly value embodiment, feelings and that which is experientially good over cognition and theoretical content.

Not only does an embodied focus aim at people's desires on an emotional level, lived religion likewise understands that any deep comprehension about God must go beyond the intellect and is intimately dependent on bodily and interactive forms of knowing. It is fundamentally impossible to discern transcendent truths without being materially active and present in the world (Shapiro, 2011). As theological doctrines are enacted through a choreographed

spatial-temporal event, new pathways are opened to go beyond abstract ideas into a transformational process that encompasses the entire person. Thus, the body does not merely transport information to the mind for analysis but becomes a profound receptor of discernment. An explicit emphasis on body-based learning for attaining meaningful spiritual understanding has invariably comprised the principal pedagogical strategy and lies at the core of most lived religions, where the formative role of practices takes precedence over doctrinal formulations (Clifford & Johnson, 2019). This perspective reveals additional insights of the paramount importance of an embodied learning process that serves as an implicit medium of cognition, enabling practitioners to learn to believe intellectual content through concrete action. In summary, while human flourishing and experiential fulfilment can be attained through verbal, informational content, insights from lived religions point out that a more direct way may be better achieved through a purposeful focus on the body. Considering these important insights, how can ecclesial communities develop relevant new strategies to improve their current practices of proclaiming the message of salvation?

Practical strategies for communicating salvation in the twenty-first century

The preceding discussion has highlighted that the conditions for transmitting the Christian message of salvation have radically changed, and that late-modern people are predominantly interested in the benefits of salvation for present-day life, which is typically accompanied by the endeavour to attain experiential satisfaction that is often related to embodied forms of spirituality. Merely hearing words about the good news is not enough. These words are expected to offer concrete advantages and a quality life beginning now. Taking these yearnings seriously the Church in the west can respond appropriately, not by abandoning its responsibility to faithfully proclaim the biblical message of salvation, but merely by reemphasizing certain aspects already contained within its rich historical tradition. Such an increased intentionality avoids the danger of a cultural usurpation of biblical norms, while simultaneously engaging in proper forms of contextualization that can result in more effective ways of communication. While there certainly is an abundance of creative ideas and areas deserving attention, for the purpose of the present discussion I want to suggest two practical ways forward.

First, ecclesial communities would benefit from a return to intentionally exploring various liturgical elements that go beyond the principal use of words. A particular appreciation and accompanying prioritization of the body and its paramount role for enacting theological content has the potential to offer promising possibilities to effectively satisfy some of the most fundamental human desires, while simultaneously transmitting important truths (LaMothe, 2008). Such an exterior reorientation that propagates the body in terms of its profound ability to apprehend religious knowledge does not diminish the significance of text-based information. It merely acknowledges the strategic validity of this approach, for "the praxis of the church is in fact the embodiment of its theology. Christian praxis is understood as the medium through which the Christian community embodies and enacts its fundamental vision of the gospel" (Anderson, 2001: 48). This conceptualization of the gospel is significant, for it goes beyond the affirmation of doctrinal statements by including worship, prayer, interpersonal relationships, and an emotional encounter that has the potential of leading people to assume a posture of wonder. Thus, by processing reality through an experiential engagement that stirs the imagination, salvation can be felt here and now, which is precisely what late-modern people long for. Such an intentional augmentation of the inherent meaning of the gospel affirms the necessity of not merely hearing the message about Christ but experiencing a transformative new life as a direct result of that message (Ward, 2017: 48). Although this line of reasoning may appear self-evident, I argue here that attaining this objective can currently best be achieved through an overriding focus on the body.

Practices are not only remarkably useful to comprehend underlying theoretical content, but any real understanding is wholly conditional upon the guided medium of embodied worship and practical engagement since this approach is fundamentally able to express the substance of belief in a profound way (Grumett, 2015: 15). Simply put, knowing is inseparable from doing. The internal, subconscious dimension that is contingent on the physical body has an enormous formative and transformative function. People often do not change solely through mental processes or an acceptance of elaborate ideas, but through habit-forming activities, repeated gestures, and a myriad of other embodied liturgical activities that imprint relevant information onto their inner being. This does not abrogate the value of verbal communication, it merely elevates the tacit, yet powerful influence of physicalities and active participation as an essential component to impart deep aspects of truth that bring about lasting change. In fact, some recent research has suggested that an intentional focus on a bodily involvement can prove to be more effective during a conversion

process than the traditional models aiming at cognitive understanding (Taylor, 2019). The seemingly simple, habit-forming power of participating through the physical enactment of various Christian practices and rituals seems to be quite constructive in communicating complex propositional concepts that can over time ultimately evolve to an acceptance of the Christian faith. It is a fundamentally useful way that over time forms people's identities and sense of belonging.

The procedure suggested here is not intended to be normative but rather sequential, claiming that the embodiment of implicitly transformative truths ought to precede the comprehension of rational particularities, where experience comes before understanding. It is important, however, that while this process may be personal, it should not remain permanently subjective, but must be given contextual meaning by the interpretive community. Such an approach helps to explain and locate a variety of experiences within the Christian story. One legitimate question at this point may relate to specific liturgical practices that have perhaps proven themselves as decidedly useful in transmitting key doctrinal content. Another consideration may inquire regarding the most promising ways how secular people could be convincingly persuaded to participate in such practices. Since responding to these understandable reflections goes beyond the scope of this article, it is important to highlight again not a formulaic list of prescribed procedures, but the necessity of prioritizing the transformative power of the body as a key tool to impart theological truths and provide avenues for meaningful human experiences. For this reason, the Church would do well to re-envision the significant potential of the existing embodied elements already contained within its liturgical and worship practices. The second strategy besides a renewed focus on the body that can assist ecclesial communities to attain greater effectiveness in their presentation of salvation and the good life is intimately connected to a communal emphasis.

Since human flourishing is dependent upon materiality and an embodied reality, which is fundamentally anchored in the Christian understanding of the incarnation, then from a Trinitarian theological perspective, community and the relational dimension of salvation are likewise indispensable for ultimately achieving the good life (Chandler, 2015). Being made in the image of God from a biblical perspective, human beings must look beyond their individual selves and relate to others. If harmony and love characterize the essence of the triune God, then the good news must entail a soteriological dimension that is both personal and experienced relationally alongside of others. In other words, an essential component of a holistic message of salvation necessarily presupposes the vertical reality of reconciliation to God, while simultaneously emphasizing the horizontally reconciled relationships between people. Although this

position may go against the individualistic attitudes of late-modern people, the fact remains that even within the current secular context, there is a deep longing for meaningful relationships (Seel, 2018: 50). Even for those who show little interest in the theological angle of a restored relationship to God, the deep-seated desire to experience intimate community remains. There are other reasons that make the communal aspect imperative.

The previously mentioned focus on the body for attaining genuine understanding and experiential satisfaction implies a considerable interdependence with others. Sharing life and an active participation in communities of practice are essential because spiritual discernment is contingent upon the embodiment of theoretical content in the presence of others. And since liturgy is inherently individual as well as relational, it provides an ideal platform for collectively enacting and hence articulating a shared theological story. By embodying these stories in unity with others and engaging in an ongoing process of interpretation, comprehension follows. This kind of co-participatory experience can lead to a profound reshaping of deeply held assumptions through a continuously evolving integration of thought and action. Such a reliance on others is deliberate, for it aims to resist the prevalent attitude of autonomy and self-sufficiency that tends to reduce religion and spirituality to a private affair. Instead, a true religious experience and even self-knowledge requires corporate involvement. Propositional content certainly retains its validity, but any authentic emotional fulfilment can only be achieved in the context of shared human relationships. Thus, the participatory dimension and interpersonal relationships take sequential precedence over an individual affirmation of ideas.

Deep transformation requires a thoughtful integration of unifying communal actions and an effective verbal communication of factual content through words. This strategic approach considers the spiritual sensibilities of the entire person and addresses both the intellect and the emotions, which can potentially lead to a genuine faith commitment. Since this may require some time, an intentional openness to the idea of belonging before believing is therefore foundational in providing space for identity construction. During this transformative process the prioritization of embodiment is crucial, since shared social practices by groups of people have always contributed to the development of one's identity (Wenger, 1998). Consequently, the formative and integrative role of collective embodiment to establish belonging and influence belief, further strengthens the significance of a bodily and communal emphasis as imperative for the communication and appropriation of theological truths. Since conditions have significantly changed in the modern secular west, it is crucial to convey a holistic and multidimensional understanding of salvation

that deliberately seeks to proclaim the biblical assurance relating to the future and at the same time provide, "quality of relationship, inner well-being, openness to others, being willing to be challenged, accepting the struggle and cost of growth, and recognizing that one's own well-being is bound up with that of others" (Marsh, 2018: 210). Reflecting upon this new reality is important, if Christians desire to transmit a relevant and contextually sensitive message that contemporary people consider good news.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church.
London: SCM Press.
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Roxburgh, Alan J. 2021.
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HARVEY KWIYANI WAS, UNTIL recently, a Lecturer in African Christianity and Theology at Liverpool Hope University. He has been appointed as CEO of Global Connections (the UK Evangelical Network for World Mission Agencies) and is also leading a Master's programme in African Diaspora Christianity at the Church Mission Society in Oxford. Kwiyani grew up in Malawi, has lived in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and the USA, and now lives in the UK. During his time in the USA as a PhD student in Mission Theology, he realized that he was only reading about white mission theologians (male) in his studies and wondered what African voices could contribute to the discourse. His PhD and his book *Multicultural Kingdom* were based on this thought. The focus is then on the two-in-one question of what African mission theology can contribute

to the western discourse and, more practically, whether African mission can religiously animate the secular west. His questions also lead directly to questions of diversity and racism. Therefore, he combines his missionary theological concern with the concern to open the discourse to voices from other parts of the world.

His latest book, *Multicultural Kingdom*, is divided into eleven chapters. It begins with the image of the mosaic and ends with an appeal to break up the monocultural setting in the churches (Chapters 1 and 11). In the first chapter, the author narrates personally and narratively how he realised that the church should be a multicultural mosaic. In doing so, he refers to his home country Malawi, where he experienced church as fundamentally multicultural and polyphonic. He experiences this differently in the Western context, and in this book, specifically in the British context. The church is segregated, people of different skin colours and backgrounds do not worship together (Chapter 1). From there Kwiyani builds his argument, first drawing attention to the growth of Christianity in Africa and the growth of migrant churches, and then charting the missionary movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America to Europe. In doing so, he notes that Europe itself has become one of the new and central mission fields (Chapters 3 and 4). At the end of Chapter 4, Kwiyani reveals the concern and aim of his book: "It is the argument of this book that a proper engagement between British and non-Western Christians resident in Britain will enrich British Christianity, and hopefully help it rediscover its missional impulses to re-evangelize Britain" (61).

In the fifth chapter, the author presents the multicultural Christian reality in Britain with the conclusion that the number of Asian, African and Latino believers far exceeds the number of white British (Chapter 5). In Chapters 6–10, Kwiyani discusses the chances of a multicultural church and a multicultural kingdom. In doing so, he argues theologically, drawing on the practice of the early Church, insights from contemporary theology and his background. In Chapter 10, the author first introduces a multicultural inclusive church and then discusses three concepts that can increase diversity in congregations and churches: Hospitality, Learning to listen and Cross-cultural relationships. At the end of Chapter 10 he states that a new post-colonial theology in a multicultural world is needed, one "that will discredit the racial prejudices that prevail in the Church today. In Christ, race should not matter" (142). In conclusion, the author draws a church of the future that is colourful, diverse and multicultural.

Multicultural Kingdom deals with two exciting phenomena that many theologians, pastors and believers in Europe are not even aware of: the rapid growth of migration churches and the re-missionization of Europe. Both topics

are marginal or non-existent in the theological discourse and church practice of traditional state and national churches. The book does an excellent job of raising awareness and at the same time shows the biblical contexts of justification and the opportunities of a multicultural church. The strength of the book lies in the many, often personal, narrative sections. Kwiyani excellently illustrates experiences that have shaped his thoughts and how his reflections relate to practice. At the same time, this book offers an African theological contribution to the European situation, which is highly exciting. The weaknesses of the book lie in three areas:

1. There is some repetition, which does not offer a new perspective on the discourse.
2. Not all concepts have been clarified: Christianity and Church are sometimes used analogously. Mission theology mainly refers to the Protestant mission, which is then again used as a concept for the whole mission theological discourse.
3. I would have liked to see more critical questioning of whether and why mission, especially from a multicultural perspective, is necessary at all. Does Europe need to be re-missionized, and if so, what are the decisive arguments for this, apart from the biblical motives and the decline of Christianity in Europe?

Despite these critical points, I highly recommend this book. It takes the reader on a multicultural journey in their own context, brings to mind things that are only marginally considered and is, especially through the narrative parts, very catchy – even while on the last page, the story of Kwiyani's mother from the first page was still fresh in my memory.

Roxburgh, Alan J. 2021.

Joining God in the Great Unraveling: Where We Are & What I've Learned.

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.

ISBN: 978-17-2528-850-8

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The starting point of Roxburgh's latest book is "Modernity's Great Wager", namely the "modern project", the Enlightenment and associated philosophical and cultural movements that have "bet the farm" on the proposition that *life can be lived well without God*. A second starting point is Roxburgh's observation that we are living through a time of great unraveling, both in what he calls our Euro-tribal churches and in the West generally.

He argues that Euro-tribal churches have largely been colonized by modernity's technocratic rationality, driven by professionalism, technique, management and control, in order to bend the world to our will, and so has little need for God's agency. These churches have unwittingly swallowed Modernity's Great Wager and functionally operate on the basis of human agency. Today

Euro-tribal churches are church- and clergy-centred and obsessed with fixing the church and their own survival. Their focus on getting people to come to the church is no longer effective.

However, Roxburgh notes that the Holy Spirit is already fermenting change. Many church members understand that "business as usual" is no longer possible. Change comes from the grass-roots in congregations and not from seminaries or wider church leadership. For the Euro-tribal churches to join God in the neighbourhood, they need to embrace new ways of knowing, new metaphors and language worlds, postures and apprenticing, where God is the active subject and is essential to the outcomes.

In writing this book, Roxburgh is documenting his journey since writing *Joining God, Remaking the Church, Changing the World* in 2015. Starting with the logic of Lesslie Newbigin's understanding of "how we know and its relationship to forms of knowing in late modernity" (6), he proposes a reorientation of missional life. He notes that the word *missional*, rather than describing what God is doing in the world, has become an adjectival modifier of "church". He says that in working with congregations and church systems over the past five years, he has discovered little sense of God's agency in the "missional" activities of Euro-tribal churches.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened this unraveling as the usual movement from professionals to "laity" based on programs and benchmarks set by national organizations is no longer possible. In this context the Holy Spirit is fermenting change that bubbles up from ordinary people in their congregations, in ways that are not susceptible to human management and control and cannot be captured by vision statements or strategic plans. Roxburgh had already challenged many of the assumptions behind the strategic planning approach to church leadership in his 2010 book, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition.*

In documenting his journey, Roxburgh notes that he has been influenced by a number of "conversation partners" that have assisted him in grappling with different metaphors of meaning. In particular, he mentions four, beginning with Mary Jo Leddy, the Catholic theologian and activist, who noted in the early 1980s that the religious communities of which she was part were becoming threadbare and needed reweaving with fresh threads. In doing this she draws on the ordinary Christian practices of place, prayer and discernment.

Lauren E. Oakes, a young PhD student at Stanford, researched the dieback of Yellow Cedar in southeast Alaska in 2010–16. In reflecting on place and relationship she discovered how native women, who were weavers in the tradition of their people, used threads made from the bark of the tree, viewing

it not as a resource to be harvested but as part of the life-world they co-inhabited. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a sociologist and scholar re-entered her indigenous North American context and submitted herself to elders, learning about resurgence in the face of dispossession. Finally, Simone Weil (1909–43) a French intellectual who taught philosophy while working in a Renault factory, reflected on the way technocratic elites controlled the way everyday life was lived in communist, fascist and capitalist societies.

Newbigin, like these four women in their different ways, is calling for a fundamental transformation of the imaginations of Christians. Roxburgh argues that, "far from being over, the missional conversation that Newbigin shaped needs to be reimagined from outside the logic of anxiety, survival, or techniques of change" (2). Therefore, to join in the Spirit's ferment we need to embrace another language with different symbols and metaphors, assume a posture that doesn't prioritize professionalism and instead adopt a model that involves becoming apprentices to others as we journey onwards.

Leaders therefore need to ask different questions. Roxburgh suggests a number such as, "How do I listen to the Spirit's presence among my people rather than push my own agendas?", "How do I lay down my anxious need to fix, tell, and make things happen?", and "How do I create spaces where I am attending to the stories of my people?"

This is a practical little book (155 pages) that assists us in understanding the world in which we now live in the west. Roxburgh makes practical suggestions for continuing the journey. In doing so, he brings a range of understandings and attitudes one doesn't need to agree with in order to take seriously his central theses. Overall he speaks of "elites" in a dismissive way, in spite of a sprinkling of statements that he doesn't dismiss the value of theology, science, research, technology, serious study and western thought forms. He also uses emotive terms like the "clergy industry" and speaks of his role as a leader in the wider church and consultant as not being particularly helpful, even though that is still what he is doing in writing this book. He dismisses technocratic approaches, yet often uses highly technical jargon (God's agency, ecclesiocentricity, relationality, Christian praxis etc).

Roxburgh goes to great lengths to emphasise that going into the neighbourhood is not a new program for evangelism, providing help or studying a community. In doing so he is in danger of giving the impression that all we bring is a Christian presence and we don't bring any good news. I don't think that is what he believes and I agree that we should not approach this as a program and look for a return on our investment.

In this book it seems to me that Roxburgh never really grapples with the question of how God works in the world. God is at work among non-Christians preparing them to receive the good news that is Jesus. We see that both biblically and in our present experience. An example of the former is the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. He sees an angel in a vision who tells him to send for Peter. Peter comes and tells him about Jesus. The Spirit falls and the rest, as they say, is history. Likewise the Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading and questioning in Acts 8. The Spirit sent Phillip to help him to make sense of it. Examples of the latter include many Muslims testifying to having dreamt that Jesus was calling them to come to him, so they sought out some Christians and came to faith. Some clarification around this would have been helpful.

Roxburgh's point about the technocratic controlling approach of the Euro-tribal churches is well made. Therefore, Roxburgh's central emphasis that God is at work, or as he puts it God has agency, is very important. Roxburgh's emphasis on the need for the disruptive ferment of the Spirit is vital. We need to embrace vulnerability, and not structure things in such a way that, if God were to depart from our presence, everything would still continue as normal. We would also do well to reflect on Roxburgh's comments about the "clergy industry".

Discernment is a gift of the Spirit and therefore a spiritual discipline. It, together with other practices are deeply rooted in our scriptural and traditional Christian practices, yet many of them have fallen into disuse. There are healthy reminders here that in a time of crisis we need to dig deeper into our roots rather than rely on techniques for fixing the church's problems. This is an important little book in our time of ferment and disruption.

Susan Lucas (ed.). 2020.

God's Church in The World: The Gift of Catholic Mission.

Norwich: Canterbury Press.

ISBN: 978-17-8622-240-4

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Anglican polity and mission remain heated topics if arguments on social media and articles in the press are anything to go by, sometimes reaching fever pitch among the adherents and opponents of movements such as "Fresh Expressions of Church" and "Save the Parish". A book seeking to elucidate a distinctly Catholic missiology for the twenty-first century seems, therefore, highly relevant. This book's chapters are largely drawn from a 2018 conference resulting from the "improbable" collaboration between representatives of Forward in Faith and Anglican Catholic Future (p. ix).

That the book is seeking to engage these ongoing debates is made clear in that by the second page of the introduction, it has already critiqued *Mission Shaped Church* (2004), a publication criticized by many prominent voices from

the Catholic wing of the Church of England. The book seeks to argue for a distinctively Catholic understanding of mission "in a language in which Catholics of all 'tribes' in the Church of England would feel at home" (p. x). The book does offer useful perspectives on mission, particularly the final chapter, "Catholic Mission in Historical Perspective", which traces the history and identifies some useful core principles. I would, however, argue that the book does not reach the potential of its proposal to represent mission from "the breadth of Catholic integrities in the Church of England today" (as the back cover claims).

Organized into a clear structure, the book offers chapters on a variety of important aspects of mission from a Catholic Anglican perspective, including prayer (Ch.1), the Trinity (Ch.2), the Sacraments (Ch.6), Social Justice (Ch.7) and more. These chapters give practical perspectives on mission through exploring the history, theology and practice of the Catholic movement in the Church of England. Largely argued succinctly and clearly, the book offers a useful introduction to mission in this tradition. Contributions and conversations from either side of the big "divide" over the ordination of women weave well together and don't feel forced.

The book's greatest weakness, I would argue, is its claimed *breadth* of "Catholic integrities". Simply representing both those for/against the ordination of women is just not enough. An example of this is that the authors are all exclusively white, and are all clergy (with the exception of one professed religious contributing to Ch.4). This seems highly problematic given the diverse make up of Catholic Anglicans, especially for a book entitled "God's Church in the *World*". A second major issue related to the first, is that there is absolutely no engagement with the relationship between Christian mission and the ongoing legacy of racism and colonialism. This lack of breadth and engagement is highlighted through some particularly problematic passages which fail to intelligently engage missiology in the diverse, postmodern and multi-faith context of twenty-first-century Britain. References to "tough black boys from estates" (p. 63) and "harder to reach estates and people groups" (p. 109) feel decidedly distasteful in a book written by elite-educated white people. Indeed, the general tone of the book seems to fail to engage with a twenty-first-century English context where the Church must learn to accept a very different place in society and national life. I would suggest, therefore, that this leaves room for further published work on Catholic mission in the Anglican tradition which engages a broader and more critical perspective.

Olsen, Steen, 2020.

Jacob's Ladder: Missional Church in the 1970s.

St. Marys, Australia: SA & RL Olsen.

ISBN-13: 978-06-4899-680-4

Reviewed by Patrick R. Keifert

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"Once upon a time," there was a Christian community in Adelaide, Australia called Jacob's Ladder. Unlike most new Christian communities in that time, Jacob's Ladder was midwifed by very young, inexperienced Christians engaging in a street ministry centered, initially, in a coffee house. The coffee house was at the top of a flight of stairs, hence Jacob's Ladder.

Somethings about Steen Olsen's book encouraged me to read *Jacob's Ladder* as a fairytale. Reading it as a fairytale allows distance for the teller and those told. I am a friend of Steen's and needed some distance from the book and the teller. I realize that using the fairytale genre can sound like I think the story is not true. I do not mean that at all. Some fairytales limit the kinds of truth claims to nostalgia or a 1960s Disneyland retelling of a fairytale. Such a fairytale would not meet the interest and purposes needed for using *Jacob's Ladder* for

purposes of Ecclesial Futures. However, fairytales can allow for multiple layers of meaning, meaningfulness and truth claims, especially through nostalgic realism. *Jacob's Ladder* uses nostalgic realism. Much more of the truth to be had from it comes from interpreting it as a fairytale.

By way of nostalgic realism, *Jacob's Ladder* invites the reader interested in Ecclesial Futures a chance to find a useable future in our past. In particular, *Jacob's Ladder* allows a retiring generation to tell its story to younger generations without pretending to just present the facts or that contemporary circumstances are not in important ways different. Quite to the contrary, the nostalgic realism of *Jacob's Ladder* allows the present reader an insight into the mythos, the social imagination, and the shards of the metanarrative that made Jacob's Ladder possible and that led to its demise. I find by this approach that it then provides enduring insights for contemporary work on ecclesial futures.

Some of the obvious insights.

The chief actors in this fairytale are young, very young, naïve, inexperienced adults. I remain amazed what the young can accomplish that as an older, experienced person would not even try. These young adults worked the streets, took up conversations with persons who would simply never be attracted to a local church. Rather than initially see themselves as the hosts, they sought to be those hosted by the street folk. They listened with the expectation that God was up to something in these people's lives. They discerned God's movement in the relationships they developed. Over time they formed new kinds of households and communities. Some worked and some didn't.

They were remarkably naïve about sex, power and money. As someone who has spent years studying and consulting with congregations, I have learned sex, power and money drive much of the life of Christian community. As the early monastic movement learned, it was necessary to take three vows: chastity, poverty and obedience. No matter how we might shape our ecclesial futures, the remarkable spiritual discernment of naivete and wisdom with respect to sex, power and money remains.

One of the greatest strengths of the narrative of *Jacob's Ladder* is the supporting evidence from diverse persons, organizations and periods in the life of this local church community. Not everyone has the same story to tell:

1. The narratives do not provide a seamless sense of community development.
2. Different perspectives make for clear lines of conflict without reducing the conflict to simple resolutions.
3. The enduring failures of established, inherited church and this fledgling ministry to find ways forward remain common. I think of the

challenging work of 'Fresh Expressions' and the inherited church in the United Kingdom.

4. The critical place of spiritual practices of prayer, listening, reading and worship.
5. The power of and the remarkable upspringing of the arts: drama, music, dance, graphic arts etc. I find this evidence especially confirming the insights of the importance of the expression of the aesthetic in our lives as central to forming local churches.
6. Perhaps because this is a "Lutheran" local church, the place of Scripture and theology stands out. Be that as it may, communities require a shared narrative and Christian community grows well out of a biblical narrative. Further, some reflective moments are necessary if a community is to learn anything. No one learns from experience alone but only from experience reflected upon and articulated. This narrative gives ample examples of learning from experience.

This last point of action/reflection learning leads me to a most obvious note: the author of this fairytale is himself a part of the tale. Imagine Ella telling Cinderella. Steen Olsen tells the tale of Jacob's Ladder. He draws from a myriad of relationships, evidence, memories, original texts and plausible narratives. He brings the wisdom of someone who becomes a bishop, teacher and churchwide director of mission. He kindly tells a tale that makes himself and others uncomfortable: nostalgic realism. He hints at darker realities but does not shame or blame.

As a friend of Steen, I had my doubts that I was an appropriate reviewer of this book. Hence the need to get some distance through the conceit of a fairytale. Be that as it may, I advise you to read this book, retell its tale, and gain insight in this past for ecclesial futures.

Ecclesial Futures publishes original research and theological reflection on the development and transformation of local Christian communities and the systems that support them as they join in the mission of God in the world.

We understand local Christian communities broadly to include traditional "parish" churches and independent local churches, religious communities and congregations, new church plants, so-called "fresh expressions" of church, "emergent" churches, and "new monastic" communities.

We are an international and ecumenical journal with an interdisciplinary understanding of our approach to theological research and reflection; the core disciplines being theology, missiology, and ecclesiology. Other social science and theological disciplines may be helpful in supporting the holistic nature of any research, e.g., anthropology and ethnography, sociology, statistical research, biblical studies, leadership studies, and adult learning.

The journal fills an important reflective space between the academy and on-the-ground practice within the field of mission studies, ecclesiology, and the so-called "missional church." This opportunity for engagement has emerged in the last twenty or so years from a turn to the local (and the local church) and, in the Western world at least, from the demise of Christendom and a rapidly changing world – which also affects the church globally.

The audience for the journal is truly global wherever the local church and the systems that support them exist. We expect to generate interest from readers in church judicatory bodies, theological seminaries, university theology departments, and in local churches from all God's people and the leaders amongst them.

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